MCS

THE FUTURE IS NOW!

MCS

THE FUTURE IS NOW!

THE FUTURE IS NOW!
Michael Simmons & Cletus Nelson
ISBN 1-84068-109-8
Published by Creation Books, London 2004
Copyright © Creation Books 2004
All rights reserved
www.creationbooks.com
Designed and set by Tears Corporation, London
Photographs: Michael Ochs Archives, Venice, California
Cover image by courtesy Elektra Records

contents

Prologue
E=MC5
9

Chapter One
Black To Comm
13

Chapter Two
"King Of The Beatniks"
21

Chapter Three:
Gotta Keep Movin'
33

Chapter Four:
Kick Out The Jams, Motherfuckers!
53

Chapter Five
Culture Jammers
73

discography
91

index
92

ROB TYNER (1944-91)

FRED SMITH (1949-94)

DENNIS THOMPSON

MICHAEL DAVIS

WAYNE KRAMER

PROLOGUE

E=MC5

"...Gentlemen, based on the information that we have obtained through other normal police functions, we would have to consider the White Panther Party as an organization based on the total destruction of the present Government of the United States and detrimental to the welfare of this country..."

–Sgt. Clifford A. Murray, Special Investigation Unit, Intelligence Section, Michigan State Police, testifying before U.S. Senate Internal Securities Subcommittee. Sept. 25, 1970[1]

October 8, 1969

Detroit MI—A Detroit Grand Jury accuses three defendants affiliated with the Michigan White Panther Party (WPP) of conspiracy to destroy the CIA office in nearby Ann Arbor. Evidence cited in the indictment links Pun Plamondon, the Panther's Minister of Defense, with the unsuccessful bombing attack. John Sinclair, the organization's unstated leader and Minister of Information, faces the conspiracy charges in addition to a 9-year sentence he received on July 28 for possessing two marijuana joints. Evidence will later reveal that Sinclair's arrest and subsequent prosecution on the narcotics charge was orchestrated at the highest levels of government as part of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) notorious Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). Yet this is only half the story.

The WPP is an Ann-Arbor-based revolutionary social movement which seeks to destroy the very fabric of America's suffocating corporate monoculture. Spearheading the attack are the MC5, the Panthers' legendary "House" band – a hard-rocking quintet whose ear-splitting, angry sound is destined to lead the

nation's disaffected youth into a violent showdown with the established order. As the nation simmers under an unrelenting wave of urban riots, volatile demonstrations, and jackbooted police crackdowns, the 5 turn up the flames with their anti-authoritarian call for "dope, rock and roll, and fucking in the streets."

Fusing an atonal, hard-charging sound with their explicitly subversive agenda, they are the psychedelic shock troops of a newly evolved humanity; a revolutionary rock and roll band on the verge of becoming the American Rolling Stones. The tie-dyed, pot smoking anarchists take their political cues from the WPP who advocate a society in which everything is free and openly support the use of psychedelics as a form of liberation from what they consider a prevailing, state-indoctrinated "pig consciousness." And they demand their agenda be achieved *by any means necessary*. Firearms are as much a part of their tactical arsenal as guitars and weed. Indeed, in many instances the band ends their rehearsals by honing their marksmanship skills with Ann Arbor's militant Black Panther chapter.

Their watchword is "Total Energy," and their shows often take on the dynamics of a religious revival with their thunderous dual guitar attack sounding the first thunderclaps of the coming apocalypse. Many gigs throughout the Midwest explode into riots. As the only band to play at the historic 1968 Chicago Democratic Counter-Convention, their set is interrupted by military helicopters and baton-toting Chicago police. The event escalates into complete and total mayhem. "Had the horns of the Huns ever had noise to compare?" asks Norman Mailer who witnesses the aural onslaught. Mailer likens the 5's sound to "the roar of the beast in all nihilism," "the sound of death by explosion within," and "a climax of vibrations like one rocket blasting out of itself."[2]

Months later, the MC5's highly influential first album *Kick Out The Jams,* released in February 1969, soars to 30th position on the Billboard charts and the 5 stand on the precipice of reaching millions with their high decibel call-to-arms. But a falling-out with their record label, coupled with the indictment of the White Panther Party, signals the end of the band's brief stint on the edge of a revolutionary breakthrough.

Within three years, the MC5 would dissolve after numerous record industry double-crosses, internal feuds, and widespread drug abuse. However, their brief presence laid the groundwork for the future of modern rock. It's often been said

that the Velvet Underground only sold a few thousand albums during their ephemeral existence, but everyone who bought one went on to start a band. The same can be said of the MC5 whose tendency toward "cranking our amps to ten and using feedback and distortion," played a pivotal role in the development of both Punk Rock, Heavy Metal and several other musical genres.[3]

Notes

1. Cited in John Sinclair, Guitar Army: Street Writings/Prison Writings; Douglas Publishing Company: New York, p. 31.

2. Norman Mailer, Miami and the Siege of Chicago.

3. Ian Fines, "The Rise and Fall of the MC5," *Perfect Sound Forever*, (November 1998). (www.perfectsoundforever.com)

CHAPTER ONE

BLACK TO COMM

THE GENESIS OF THE MC5 SOUND

Like Birmingham England, much has been written about the legendary "Detroit Sound"; a corrosive rust-buck aesthetic reflecting the region's dynamic, soot-spewing industrial environment. It is an unfiltered form of rock and roll that resonates like a ground-rumbling V-8 engine; a musical style that values power over virtuosity, loudness over subtlety, and aggression over artistic pretense. However, when the Michigan rock scene erupted in the 1960's, the area was primarily known as ground zero for Barry Gordy's Motown Empire. Yet within a few short years, the MC5's fully-cranked primordial growl would explode like a neutron bomb and engender an earth-moving tectonic shift in the Motor City Music scene.

It was definitely a momentous time in the history of rock. The prefabricated pop songs that dominated the charts throughout the previous decade were giving way to a new approach that relied heavily on the electric guitar. Although musicians had been using pickups to expand the resonance of chorded solos long before the Second World War, it wasn't until late 1948 when Leo Fender began manufacturing the "Broadcaster" (later renamed the "Telecaster") that the concept truly reached its potential. Possessing a solid body and two electromagnetic pickups, this innovative design would become the gold standard for rock musicians throughout the world.

As early as the 1950's there were already indications of the new instrument's obvious potential. Buddy Holly's fast, furious strumming and guitarist James Burton's brilliant "bent-note" solos that boosted vocalist Ricky Nelson's otherwise tepid string of hits were portents of things to come. However, it was not until the early 1960's when guitar rock began to reach critical mass. As self-professed English "Blues Scholars" like Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton, and Jimmy Page

embraced the timeless riffs of such luminaries as Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson, and "Blind" Lemon Jefferson, the "Blues Craze" of 1963 would initiate a sonic revolution. In a few short years, the British Invasion would be in full swing as American adolescents ecstatically embraced a surfeit of English outfits from the Beatles' harmonious first albums to the brooding, Blues-inspired licks of the Yardbirds.

The Midwest was not immune to this rapidly-evolving cultural phenomenon. As inspired fans sought to emulate the sounds of swinging London, hundreds, if not thousands of would-be rock stars repaired to the family garage in order to perfect solos, learn new chords, or just blast their amps. As groups formed, venues like the Pumpkin in Detroit, the Fifth Dimension in Ann Arbor, and The Club in Monroe began hosting local talent. Of particular note was The Hideaway formed in 1964 by local promoters Dave Leon and Ed "Punch" Andrews. Located in Harper Woods, the rented hall became a proving ground for untold legions of garage guerrillas as dozens of talented (but short-lived) groups like the Rationals, the Fugitives (which would later become SRC), and The Pleasure Seekers played to standing room-only crowds.

In this highly competitive atmosphere, five hardscrabble teens were secretly plotting world domination from inside MC5 vocalist Rob Tyner's Blue 1960 Chevrolet. Facing a bleak future either in the army or toiling away like their parents on the assembly line, there was no middle ground: they had to succeed at any cost. However, they weren't merely concerned with the materials rewards of rock stardom, the 5 also engaged in deep metaphysical discussions. "We figured out the keys to all of the universe's mysteries in that blue Chevy. We also foresaw the coming of MTV, laser disks, Blockbuster, monster trucks, space travel, and the world-wide web," remembers guitarist Wayne Kramer in an irreverent recollection of the band's earliest days.[1] As the close-knit conspirators cruised the streets of downtown Detroit discussing various criminal schemes and gimmicks to hype their up-and-coming act, it was definitely a time of great soul-searching. "We were pushing the limits of teenage behavior," Wayne recalls. "We were searching for identity as people...and as a band."

Possessing a stocky build, kinky dark hair, and a love for muscle cars, motorcycles, and rock and roll, Kramer (née Wayne Kambes) was destined to become the band's unstated leader. Born in 1948, as a young boy he moved with his family to the "downriver" town of Lincoln Park, MI. This geographic locale was of no small significance in status-conscious Michigan. To live "downriver" was to

reside within spitting distance of Rouge, the Ford Motor Company's central plant. One of many small suburban redoubts surrounding Detroit, the area was largely populated by the families of assembly line employees, welders, and factory workers.

"The Lincoln Park school system was noted for the lowest payscale for teachers in the state," mused Gary Grimshaw, who would later shape the MC5's image with his psychedelic poster art[2]. "We called it 'Stinkin' Park." While Kramer was still a young adolescent, his parents divorced – an unhappy occurrence that would nevertheless play an important role in his lifelong love of music. As chance would have it, a new boyfriend of his mother played guitar. "Every few months his pals would come over and they would have electric guitars and violins and they would set up in the living room," he would later remember fondly.[3] "They'd play a set and then go into the kitchen and drink whiskey and I'd jump on somebody's electric guitar. It was just fabulous."[4]

For the youth of Lincoln Park, the post-war years were also a time of economic opportunity. Jobs were abundant, wages were high, and anyone could aspire to rock stardom. "You could buy an electric guitar for $125 at Sears. The better stuff, like Fenders and Gibsons, were way up to about $300, but all within the reach of kids like us," Kramer recalled[5]. As the headquarters of Motown, there was also no shortage of musical inspiration. "I thought the Beatles were a pretty good band, but the Motown session band was better," he later told a reporter[6].

Seminal rocker Chuck Berry was another influence: "For a guitar player, Chuck Berry was the guy – at least in Lincoln Park, Michigan. You were judged by how many Chuck Berry solos you knew, note for note," Kramer later explained.[7] True to his Detroit roots, he also envisioned a rock sound that incorporated another love: fast cars. "We all shared a love of hot rods and big-assed engines. I even took a job at the drag strip selling ice cream – 'ICE COLD, ICE COLD ICE CREAM!' – just so I could be there every week. Drag racing was in our blood. I mean, it was loud and fast, just like the music."[8] For the young guitarist, music had to a have a certain "drive": a fervent intensity exemplified by R&B legend James Brown.

By 1963, when he was fifteen, Kramer had already assembled his first group. Named in honor of a legendary dragster, the Bounty Hunters became one of many Detroit-area bands vying for national recognition. Although the Bounty Hunters would gain a modicum of recognition playing local dances and parties, more importantly, his early experimentation resulted in a portentous meeting with the

bongo player of a rival group known as the Vibratones.

Born in West Virginia in 1949, Frederick Smith and his parents were part of a mass diaspora of working class Southerners who gravitated to Detroit in search of work in the state's many automobile plants. They settled in Lincoln Park just a stone's throw away from Kramer's home. Raised by a stern father, the sometime juvenile delinquent sought escape through the sounds of Chuck Berry and Little Richard.

"Fred [Smith] and I started playing guitars together, must have been the tenth grade – in '64 we played in a lot of rival bands," Kramer remembered in a 1996 interview.[9] As Wayne was relatively new to Lincoln Park, Fred Smith was a kindred spirit who shared his love of high-energy rock and roll. As the friendship blossomed, Kramer would subsequently spend endless afternoons at Smith's house teaching the former bongo wizard the basics of rock guitar. At one point Smith purchased a Fender Duo-Sonic guitar which he subsequently returned. However, the brief purchase had a lasting effect: struck by the guitar's flashy name, he began calling himself Fred "Sonic" Smith.

After some discussion, the two talked of forming a "supergroup" that combined the best musicians from each of their respective bands. Unfortunately this project would be short-lived due to personal in-fighting and the drummer's parsimonious habit of forcing fellow band members to pay a rental fee in order to use his amplifier. Nevertheless, the upstart rock outfit regained direction after Kramer encountered a drunken beatnik named Bob Derminer in the parking lot of a White Castle hamburger stand.

With wild curly hair, thick glasses, and a mischievous sense of humor, Derminer, (who went by the name of Robin Tyner in tribute to McCoy Tyner, John Coltrane's talented pianisy), was known in Lincoln park as a poet, Science Fiction fan, and dedicated jazz fan. Although he had soundly rejected rock and roll as largely inferior to jazz, when Kramer encountered him that fateful night, he saw a changed man. "He was drunk as a skunk, had let his hair grow out, and was playing the harmonica," Kramer remembered. "I said 'Yo – what's with that? I thought you didn't like all that rock and roll stuff?'"[10] When Tyner admitted his sudden change of heart, and newfound love of the Rolling Stones, he was asked to join the Bounty Hunters.

Tyner's creative influence as vocalist and primary songwriter would become one

of the band's most important assets. "It was Tyner who was our resident intellectual. He had the funniest, most twisted sense of humor on earth and was a world-class free associator. Able to leap tall concepts in a single bound," Kramer asserts[11]. Rob would suggest that the band adopt the name MC5 to resemble the serial number on a race car engine; an obvious reference to the group's power and ferocity. Soon thereafter, Tyner realized that the name could also be employed to indicate the band's geographic origins and they became the Motor City 5.

However, the band would undergo several personnel changes and had yet to adopt the proto-metal, guitar-driven sound that would become its trademark. "No, we played a lot of blues at first, a lot of R&B. The Stones, the early Stones; before they were rock, they were blues... 'The Spider and the Fly.' That's what we were doing," remembers Pat Burrows, the MC5's first bass player.[12] According to Burrows, a kindly benefactor provided the band's equipment. "We had an old manager, a guy that backed us up on a bunch of Vox equipment. We were the first group in Detroit to have Vox equipment, and we had it all."[13]

The new equipment was quickly deployed to great effect. Distortion and feedback became an integral part of the band's live shows. As part of their ongoing experimentation, Tyner began manipulating the microphone and jamming it into the speaker cabinets to produce a siren-like wail of feedback. The 5 in its first incarnation would reach its apogee when the group opened for the Dave Clarke Five at the Ford auditorium in Detroit.

However, Smith and Kramer's insistence that the band play faster and louder with their amps fully cranked began to rankle the 5's rhythm section who wanted to head in a more traditional direction. "Well, they started moving into this avant-rock business, where they bought more amps and started getting louder and louder, and Bob Gaspar the drummer was bitching, he says, you know, 'I gotta keep slamming these drums so hard, I don't wanna play this way,'" MC5 drummer Dennis "Machine Gun" Thompson recalls.[14]

Within six months, Gaspar and Burrows had left the band to be replaced by Thompson, and newfound bassist Michael Davis. Thompson, who delivered papers in Kramer's neighborhood, was an early prodigy who had been drumming since an early age. "My brother is 10 years older than I am, and he's been a musician all his life. So when he was sixteen, I was six years old, and they had a rock and roll band, practicing music in my basement, the drummer would leave

his drums, so four year old, five year old Dennis would run down there and bang on the drums and Mom would yell down there, "Dennis, get off those drums, they're not yours!" he recalls.[15] However, he would hone his skills during these brief sessions and by his pre-teen years was already drumming at club dates and weddings.

According to Thompson, one day Kramer rode up on his motorcycle and asked him if he was interested in playing a Detroit gig with the MC5. "[I] went down there and did the job for the weekend. We had about three toothless bums just sittin' there. And here we are onstage playing 'My Generation,' and Yardbirds, and Kinks and all. That's when I joined the Five."[16]

Michael Davis, the band's soon-to-be bassist, was a well-traveled art student attending Wayne State University (WSU). At 22 he would become the oldest member of group. Although his tastes leaned more toward R&B and Dylan, a chance meeting with Rob Tyner (whose girlfriend was also attending WSU) resulted in an invitation to a 5 show in 1965. Davis was far from unimpressed. "I went to this place and those guys were playing Stones covers, Chuck Berry, Kinks and other things. There [sic] were a really good, a hot little band," he recalls.[17]

Sporting flashy brown "Beatle Boots," and possessing a worldly air, Davis went backstage to meet the band and immediately connected with both Smith and Kramer. Indeed, he regaled them with tales of New York's Lower East Side and other hip locales. Soon it was decided that the artsy Dylan fan would make a welcome addition to the band. After Burrows' sudden departure, Davis (who had some experience playing acoustic guitar), began learning the bass parts for the 5's rather limited set list.

"The MC5 was basically a cover band, playing the things that they learned how to play their instruments with and the things they admired. R&B stuff, James Brown, Chuck Berry, the Kinks, whole lotta Rolling Stones. I have to say that 90% of what we played was cover tunes," Davis recalls.[18] Nevertheless, Dennis Thompson could already sense the band was morphing into the hyped out psychedelic outfit that would one day blast the roof off the Grande Ballroom. When the 5 was slated to play at various Detroit-area high schools, the sound would be cranked to 11. "And we'd do it on purpose," Thompson asserts. "Because going to a Catholic high school like Aquinas with four Marshall stacks, totalling eight Marshall stacks for guitar players and two Sunn cabinets for the bass player, and going into a gymnasium for basketball, and just watching the

nuns, the top of their habits they wear...watching it blow off, was worth it"[19].

Kramer, who was becoming increasingly influenced by both The Who and The Rolling Stones was no less convinced that the future of rock music was moving toward a fierce, aggressive sound. As he later recalled, "The way for my band to reach the world started to become clear: fuck the Top-10. Turn the amps up and jam motherfucker! Energy, feedback, distortion, the power of the electric guitar was unleashed."[20] Early photos of the band are indicative of the British influence. With shortly-cropped hair, sweater vests, and ties, they seem far removed from their later reputation as psychedelic hippie revolutionaries. "You know, we were from Detroit, and the MC5 sounded like it had been stamped out of the auto factories. And we had the juvenile delinquent look, the grease look. We combed our hair back in a kind of pompadour and wore our trousers tight," Kramer would later recall.[21]

Along with such typical crowd pleasers like "Louie Louie" by the Kingsmen, "Gloria" by Them, "I'm A Man," the Muddy Waters classic popularized by the Yardbirds, and others, the MC5 were slowly beginning to carve out their own identity. The first incarnation of "Looking At You", with Tyner's disaffected Roger Daltrey vocal style and brilliant harmonica intro would pave the way for the song's later rendition as an original MC5 tune (it was released as a single in March 1968). A re-write of the Rolling Stones' "Down Home Girl," would form the basis for "One of The Guys." Yet the song which truly presages the 5's avant rock potential was a dazzling, extra-long, high-energy jam session titled "Black To Comm."

In 1966, Kramer moved out of his mother's home and joined his fellow band members then living in the beatnik neighborhood adjoining Wayne State University. The MC5 were determined to gain credibility among the many artists, poets, writers, and hippies who congregated in this largely bohemian environment. "Our thinking was 'Look, this hippie thing is going to be big. It's going to be *big*. If we get all the hippies to like us, we'll get over.'" There was one man who would provide them with the cache needed to reach this important target audience. His name was John Sinclair and his behind-the-scenes influence would make the MC5 the stuff of legend.

Notes

1. Dennis Kramer, Liner notes to *MC5: '66 Breakout!; Alive!*/Total Energy Records, 1999.
2. "Gary Grimshaw, "Gary Grimshaw on the MC5," posted to MC5 tribute site, 1/27/01 http://www.makemyday.free.fr/ggrimshaw.htm
3. Fred Goodman, The Mansion On The Hill, (NY: Random House, 1997) p. 154.
4. Op Cit. p. 154.
5. Kramer, Op Cit.
6. Gary Graff, "Wayne Kramer and the MC5 Still Kickin'," Guitar.com.
7. Ibid.
8. Legs McNeil, Gillian McCain, Please Kill Me: *An Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, (NY: Penguin Books Ltd., 1996) p. 35.
9. Nina Antonia, "Wayne Kramer Interview," *Record Collector*, 1996
10. Goodman, Op. Cit. p. 156.
11. Kramer, Op. Cit.
12. Ken Shimamoto, "Pat Burrows: An Interview with the Original MC5 Bass Player," *I-94 Bar*, (July 24, 2002).
13. Shimamoto, Op. Cit.
14. Ibid.
15. Ken Shimamoto, "Dennis Thompson: Phantom Patriot," *I-94 Bar*, (Undated).
16. Ibid.
17. "MC5-Michael Davis Interview," *Perfect Sound Forever*.
18. Ibid.
19. Shimamoto, Thompson Interview, Op. Cit.
20. Kramer, Op. Cit.
21. Legs McNeil, Gillian McCain, Please Kill Me: *An Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, (NY: Penguin Books Ltd., 1996) p. 35.

CHAPTER TWO
"KING OF THE BEATNIKS"
ENTER JOHN SINCLAIR

Infused with a new sense of direction, the various members of the 5 were no longer content with being a mere cover band; the group's live gigs began to include high-concept impromptu jams, caterwauling off-key chords, and headache-inducing blasts of feedback-laden electro-murk. Although few knew it at the time, the Detroit-based rockers were about to transcend their humble origins as mere practitioners of Blues-based rock and roll. Indeed, these stylistic innovations, which the 5 dubbed "avant rock," would push the genre into uncharted territory. While many less-than-discerning listeners recoiled in horror at these bizarre displays of high-decibel experimentation, others felt they were witnessing the future of rock and roll. By 1966, in the words of Wayne Kramer, the band was ready to "break out." In their mind's eye, John Sinclair was the key to gaining a foothold in the Detroit. Unfortunately, the Lincoln Park upstarts soon faced an insurmountable obstacle: the influential poet had yet to discover the subversive potential of rock and roll music.

Despite his teenage enthusiasm for pioneering acts like Little Richard and Chuck Berry, the proliferation of vapid, commercialized pop music during the early 1960's left Sinclair bitterly disillusioned. In response, the future White Panther retreated back to the timeless Blues riffs of the Mississippi Delta. Moreover, his contemporary tastes leaned strongly toward Sun Ra, Coltrane and other avatars of the experimental "Free Jazz" movement. To make matters worse, the confirmed jazzman was serving a six-month stretch in the Detroit House of Corrections following a 1965 marijuana beef. Thus, not only was Sinclair indifferent to the Motor City music scene, he was inaccessible. Nevertheless, if the MC5 hoped to successfully infiltrate the area's nascent counterculture, they could find no greater ally.

Since moving to Detroit in 1964 to attend graduate school at Wayne State University (WSU), the Flint native had become a central figure in the city's insular bohemian community. Unlike many of his fellow students who found themselves cut adrift in the city's fast-paced urban environment, Sinclair had wasted little time gaining a reputation as a highly creative individual who could run with any crowd. Long before Norman Mailer urged readers to emulate the political acumen and anti-authoritarian stance of the sophisticated urban Black in his famous essay "The White Negro," Sinclair had spent two years exploring Flint's African-American community. These experiences helped shape the Sinclair persona: He was a gregarious, smooth-talking extrovert whose grad school intellect betrayed a street savvy far beyond his years.

The 23-year-old had relocated to Detroit at a portentous time one might liken to the calm before the storm; the first stirrings of what would later become the dominant 60's counterculture was then represented by a small (but influential) cohort of beatniks, musicians, experimental artists, writers, and proto-hippies. In collective opposition to prevailing cultural norms, the loose contingent could be seen at various hip local nightspots like the Red Door Gallery where the lumbering grad student met his future wife Magdalene "Leni" Arndt, a comely German émigré and talented photo artist. In the hopes of consolidating this diverse contingent of non-conformists into one viable entity, Sinclair, Leni, jazz trumpeter Charles Moore, experimental film-maker Robin Eichele, and others had founded the Detroit Artists' Workshop in November 1964.

After installing the group's headquarters on the first floor of a residence located at the corner of John Lodge and Warren Avenue, the location quickly became a celebrated gathering spot for disaffected students, aesthetic renegades, dope smokers, jazz musicians, and other societal outcasts. Foreshadowing the White Panthers' self-declared "total assault on the culture," the Workshop's founding manifesto exhorted fellow artists to oppose "square" culture in all its manifestations. By 1965, the small-but-influential collective's Sunday "Open House" events became well-attended gatherings that featured music, poetry readings, and exhibitions of ultramodern art and cinema.

Along with the Workshop's Sunday sessions and weekly events, Sinclair, a tireless promoter and prolific writer, helped produce several jazz concerts, organized the Workshop Arts Quartet, and wrote original music for the group's Music Ensemble. He also co-founded the Artists' Workshop publishing imprimatur in 1964; a thriving concern that subsequently issued a number of

books, periodicals, and leaflets featuring Detroit-area poets and writers. "We started renting houses and came to control six full two-storey houses and two storefronts all on the same block, which we managed collectively as the Artists' Workshop Cooperative Housing Project," Sinclair would later recall[1]. A skilled networker, Sinclair didn't confine his organizing efforts to the Midwest; he soon established contacts with hip communities throughout US. With a printing press and silk-screening equipment, the Workshop would also assist in the creation of some of the Midwest's first underground periodicals.

Despite the Workshop's identification with African-American culture and unconventional aesthetic leanings, in keeping with the prevailing beatnik ethos, Sinclair and his fellow artists were largely uninterested in seeking to raise the consciousness of their fellow citizens or engage in any form of social activism. Instead, they looked within and dreamed of creating an idyllic retreat away from the inherent insanity of the nuclear age. As Sinclair later reminisced in a political pamphlet:

"We didn't want to have anything to do with the straight, "normal" world at all – we didn't like what straight people were doing to each other and to the rest of the people on the planet (as well as to the planet itself), but we figured if we left them alone they'd leave us alone, and we could reach and maintain a sort of détente which would let straight people destroy themselves while we concentrated on making our fantasies real and building up an alternative social order in the process."[2]

However, there would be no such détente. For all intents and purposes, Detroit was (and remains) a company town; an industrial City largely controlled by the powerful interests which owned and operated the many factories, mills, and auto plants that dotted the Motor City landscape. After decades of bloody labor battles, free thinkers, non-conformists, and other unconventional types were distrusted and closely monitored. The virulent anti-Communism of the previous decade had only exacerbated this intolerance toward "outside agitators." Indeed, the Michigan State Legislature passed a measure in 1952 known as the Communist Control Act which allowed the State Police Commissioner to form a clandestine "Red Squad" to ferret out and compile dossiers on politically suspect individuals and organizations. Shortly thereafter, a similar branch was formed within the Detroit Police Department (DPD).[3] Both units were subsequently deployed to monitor the activities of beatniks, peace activists, and student radicals.

Thus, it wasn't long before Sinclair's subterranean activities collided with Detroit's reactionary police force. In October 1964, the student poet was entrapped in a police sting and jailed for marijuana possession. As this was his first offense, the student was fined and placed on probation. After this minor brush with the law, Sinclair quickly resumed his high-profile activities within the Artists' Workshop. However, the arrest was not without repercussions. "Detroit's Red Squad immediately opened files on him and began to take special interest in the beatnik community," reveals historian Jeff A Hale.[4] Months later, he was in custody again after an undercover operative infiltrated the Artists' Workshop and began pestering Sinclair to procure him a quantity of the illicit herb. "He had followed me around for three weeks begging me to sell him some, give him some, lead him to some reefer, and I finally decided that the best way to get rid of him (short of knocking him on the head) would be to get him some worthless marijuana so he'd go away and never bother me again," Sinclair recalled[5].

The undercover operation provoked a siege-style raid of Sinclair's residence on 4825 John Lodge. Over two dozen officers affiliated with the Narcotics Detail converged on the scene and took Sinclair and six others into custody. Sensationalistic newspaper headlines splashed across the front page of local newspapers announcing the breakup of a pernicious campus narcotic ring. Charged with his second drug-related offense, Sinclair was convicted in February of 1966 and began serving the aforementioned sentence in the Detroit House of Corrections. As he pondered the chain of events that led to his incarceration, Sinclair's isolationist attitude toward authorities would undergo a marked sea change. His relationship with the MC5 would push him further toward the revolutionary goals later articulated in the White Panther Manifesto. However, the group's initial meeting with the notorious John Sinclair was far from auspicious.

To celebrate his release from jail, in August 1966, Leni organized a gala event in Sinclair's honor. The celebratory evening included poetry readings, dancing exhibitions, and musical performances. Sensing a momentous opportunity, Wayne, Sonic, Dennis, Michael, and Rob gathered their gear and prepared to blow away the assembled crowd. "I had no idea who they were or where they came from or who told them they could play there," remembered Leni Sinclair in a recent interview[6]. Undeterred, the brash rock and roll quintet prepared to pull out all the stops and blow the roof off the place with their "avant rock" sound. After what seemed like an interminable wait, sometime after 4AM, the MC5 took the stage.

"So we cranked up our fucking hundred-watt amps and were blasting away all the hippies and the beatniks. They didn't care what you played – hippies would dance to anything," remembered Wayne Kramer. "So we were in the middle of our set, dedicating a song to this guy John Sinclair, and his wife pulls the plug on us."[7]

It was definitely not the reception they had hoped to receive. Apparently a shotgun-toting neighbor had grown weary of the constant noise emanating from the beatnik pad next door. After dramatically registering his displeasure, Leni was forced to act decisively lest Sinclair's brief moment of freedom land him right back in jail. "So I pulled the plug on the band, there was no way I could make them stop, so I pulled out their electricity and they stopped."[8] Shocked by this rather unfriendly reaction, the dispirited band packed up their equipment and angrily stormed off. Unfortunately, the worst was yet to come. Shortly thereafter, Sinclair blasted "jive rock and rollers" in a column appearing in a local publication and condescendingly urged them to embrace the more authentic sounds of Sun Ra and Coltrane. Kramer wasn't reticent about directly confronting Sinclair. "I went over to his house and said, 'Hey man, what's up with all this? We're in the Community too. And we know about John Coltrane and we need a place to rehearse and can't we use the Artist Workshop too?"[9]

It was a bold approach that didn't fail to impress the elder beatnik. Indeed, Kramer was not without a certain rough-hewn charm and soon the two were puffing on a joint. After parting on good terms, the poet's disdainful rejection of the MC5 would undergo a profound metamorphosis. Within months he would become the group's biggest fan. This newfound admiration of angry rock and roll had much to do with a number of developments that were radically reshaping the staid community surrounding WSU. During his brief period of incarceration, British-inspired rock music had taken the region by storm. A genuine social movement was taking root and mind-altering substances were no longer the primary obsession of beatniks and jazz musicians. WSU students and other assorted freaks were all "blowing pot," while newly anointed hippies clad in psychedelic garb began to proliferate.

Hoping to capitalize on this new influx of energy, in 1967 Sinclair shed his beatnik "outsider" status and formed Trans-Love Energies (TLE): an aesthetic collective-cum-utopian community. This unrelenting drive to build a new world upon the wreckage of the old order was largely fueled by the newest addition to Detroit's underground economy: LSD 25.

First discovered by esteemed scientist Albert Hoffman in 1943, the potent hallucinogen is one of 25 compounds extracted from the rye fungus ergot. Hoffman discovered the drug's psychoactive properties after inadvertently taking a large dose of the potent hallucinogen. "My field of vision swayed before me like the reflections in an amusement-park mirror. Occasionally I felt as if I were out of my body," he later wrote.[10] Initially considered a possible treatment for schizophrenia and other mental disorders, the newly discovered compound was produced by Sandoz, a Swiss pharmaceutical firm. However, by the 1950's, the Eli Lilly Company would become America's biggest supplier of the drug. Within a decade, Timothy Leary, Ken Kesey, and other "Psychedelic Templars" would urge hippies across the nation to partake in the white-hot visions produced by the powerful acid.

By 1967, downtown Detroit and Ann Arbor were awash in LSD and the infectious "revolution trip" began to take hold. Sinclair would later reflect on the transformative powers of the potent hallucinogen:

"LSD brought everything into focus for the first time in our mixed-up lives, but it was more than just a subjective phenomenon too – acid appeared on the scene at the precise moment in history when it was needed, and the ideology it gave rise to in our minds and bodies made perfect sense of all the previously confusing objective developments which had taken place in the West since the emergence of electronic technology and the isolation of the atom."[11]

Despite the cosmic visions experienced by the growing TLE collective, the organization wasted little time engaging in counterproductive navel gazing. Along with co-founder and gifted artist Gary Grimshaw, Sinclair quickly put his organizational acumen to work. TLE Unlimited, the group's business arm began organizing festivals, promoting local artists, and sponsoring rock concerts. Meanwhile, Grimshaw and Sinclair attempted to bring together the diverse elements of Detroit's multifaceted counterculture by means of a central "tribal council" that would utilize their collective resources to assist local freaks with crash pads, employment referrals, and other services. It was during this period of frenetic activity that Sinclair offered to become the MC5's manager; a decision that would have far-reaching consequences for all parties concerned.

With the exception of Dennis Thompson who was living at home and attending WSU, the other four band mates were then residing with their girlfriends and others in two cramped apartments located on Canfield Avenue in Detroit. Despite

their shared belief in a glorious future, the group faced numerous difficulties. The 5's equipment had been repossessed, gigs were few, and poverty was staring them in the face. Even at this early stage, they had a reputation for showing up to concert dates drunk, missing others, or playing lackluster sets. Forced to borrow equipment and bum rides to rock shows, it was unsurprising that the band's performances were often uninspired. However, when the equipment was working, they arrived on time, and didn't get too wasted, the group was easily one of the most electrifying acts in the nation.

"They were so far out that a lot of kids hated them, but I was certainly their 'biggest fan' – and not just in size. That's how I started working with them in the first place," the 6-foot-6 Sinclair later reminisced.[12] Due to their inability to play gigs on a regular basis resulting from equipment problems and other mishaps, Sinclair attempted to see the 5 at every possible opportunity and even offered to travel with the group and help carry equipment to shows. After his first experience assisting the band, Sinclair was utterly shocked. "I just couldn't believe how untogether their business operation was," he later wrote[13]. Shortly thereafter, he began discussing the possibility of becoming the fledgling group's manager. Despite his lack of experience, Sinclair felt anything would be an improvement. Obviously the 5 needed decent amps and guitars, rehearsal space, a steady mode of transportation, and greater exposure.

After the band agreed to Sinclair's proposal, the ace organizer hit the ground running. He began by working out an agreement with local rock promoter Russ Gibb who helped finance the purchase of equipment for Sonic and Rob Tyner. Wayne's mother agreed to help fund his purchases, and Mike Davis' father provided similar assistance. The MC5 now had three Sunn 100 series amps, and a rather questionable P.A. system. Although the monthly payments would take a large bite out of the group's limited income, at least the equipment problems were temporarily solved. When Emil Bacilla, a longtime MC5 supporter, graciously lent the group his van to get to gigs, Sinclair started aggressively promoting the band. Unfortunately, the public weren't yet prepared for the iconoclastic Motor City act. Although they were occasionally paid to play at college dances, fraternity parties, and other small venues, unless they were prepared to turn down their amps and forego their usual set for innocuous Beach Boys covers, the 5 would remain artistically rich but materially poor. However, the group's luck began to change with the emergence of a soon-to-be-legendary local known as the Grande Ballroom.

The shift from small, intimate clubs to larger venues constitutes an important departure point in the history of rock. The genre was no longer a fad – in cities across the nation, thousands of fans were paying top dollar to see reputed local bands and big-name touring acts. The days of rock "hops," dances, and intimate club gigs were coming to a close as larger venues like the Avalon in San Francisco and Bill Graham's Filmore East in New York's East Village began laying the foundations for the "arena rock" of the 1970's. Closely watching this development was Gibb, a Detroit high school teacher and local disk jockey.

Inspired by both the Filmore and the Avalon, the rock promoter and archetypical "hip capitalist" began putting on shows at the Grande (pronounced "Grand-E"): a former warehouse located on Grand River Avenue in Detroit. In a few months, the spacious hall would become the epicenter for the Motor City Rock explosion. Along with booking well-known touring bands, Gibb showcased local Detroit acts as well. Soon, every notable group from the MC5 to the Stooges to Ted Nugent's Amboy Dukes would pass through the Grande's doors. Sensing the 5's potential, Gibb hired the band to play 2-3 45-minute sets every other weekend at $125-per night.

At times, this was the 5's solitary source of income and was used to support the band members and their girlfriends who had collectively relocated to an apartment formerly occupied by TLE. Despite the inherent lack of material comforts, the MC5 began rehearsing daily, honing their experimental sound, and adding new and original music to their set list, including such tracks as "Kick Out The Jams, Motherfuckers!", "Starship", and "One Of The Guys".

Within a short time, the MC5 (aided by Trans-Love's psychedelic light show and Gary Grimshaw's amazing poster art) had become the pre-eminent band in Detroit. Along with TLE, a devoted following began to flock to their shows and, as Sinclair began formulating his theories which viewed rock and roll as a tool for revolution, the band was moving inexorably toward violent confrontation with local police.

Notes

1. John Sinclair, "Marijuana Revolution," Political Pamphlet: Rainbow People's Party (July, 1971).

2. Ibid.

3. "The 50's At Home," Michigan Historical Center, 2000.

4. Peter Braunstein, William Doyle (editors), Imagine Nation: *The American Counterculture of the 1960's and 70's* (UK: Routledge, 2002). Specifically cited: Chapter 5: Jeffrey A. Hale, "The White Panthers 'Total Assault on the Culture,'" pp. 130

5. Sinclair, Op. Cit.

6. Ken Shimamoto, "Leni Sinclair: Through the Camera's Eye," *I-94 Bar*, (Undated).

7. Legs McNeil, Gillian McCain, Please Kill Me: *An Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, (NY: Penguin Books Ltd., 1996) pp. 42.

8. Shimamoto, Op. Cit.

9. McNeil, McCain, Op. Cit. pp. 43.

10. David Black, Acid: *A New Secret History* (UK: Vision, 2001) pp. 26.

11. John Sinclair, Guitar Army, (NY: Douglas Book Corporation, 1972), pp. 22.

12. John Sinclair, "The MC5: How the Jams Were Kicked Out," *Zigzag* (July, 1977).

13. Ibid.

MC5

Personal Management:
John Sinclair for
Russ Gibb Productions

CHAPTER THREE

GOTTA KEEP MOVIN'

THE MC5 CONQUER MICHIGAN

The MC5's alliance with Trans-Love was destined to be a fortuitous one. With steady gigs at the Grande, a place to rehearse, and a dedicated audience of energetic hippies, the group was on the verge of blasting off into the great sonic beyond. In many respects, the large Ballroom would serve as a high-decibel laboratory for the group's fertile alchemy of Blues, R&B, Soul, Free Jazz, and caterwauling electro-murk. As the uncontested "House Band," there were few limits placed on the energetic rock quintet. Indeed, Rock historian Fred Goodman would later remark that the MC5, "Had all the swagger and ego any rock band would ever need."[1]

Gibb's Ballroom would help inspire two songs that would later define the 5's emerging sound. "Kick Out the Jams, Motherfuckers," was a product of the group's less-than-respectful attitude toward over-hyped out-of-town sensations. "When other bands finally started coming to Detroit and we'd open shows for them, we found out how lame they were," Wayne Kramer recently recalled.[2] "So, being hormonally driven and arrogant, we used to fuck with them and yell at them, 'Kick out the jams or get off the stage!'"

One afternoon after huffing some reefer, Wayne and Rob Tyner decided to create a song which articulated the MC5's high-powered performance ethos. As Kramer laid down the opening chords, Tyner disappeared into another room and returned with the lyrics to what would become one of the 5's most memorable songs. With its lightning fast power chords, ample feedback, and fast-paced speed rap, "Jams" would provide a useful blueprint for the proliferation of punk and hardcore bands destined to follow in the group's footsteps. However, if the former was revolutionary for introducing the notion of "short, loud, and fast," the band's finale song, "Black To Comm," resided at the other end of the spectrum.

A longstanding improvisational riff that dated back to the group's Lincoln Park days, "Comm" was a non-linear free form track that could last up to 15 minutes. In a recent interview, Dennis Thompson revealed the origin of the song's name:

"'Black To Comm' was when we were playing the Grande Ballroom, we used to let bands – a lot of bands would use our equipment, and we would say, 'Fuck you, if you break it, we told ya...black to comm.' Quite simply, on the P.A. amp, 'comm' is commonly referred to as the negative ground, and the 'black' was the wire...clear from the power source, right? And that's exactly what it was, it's like, 'Okay, just be sure you put the black wire into the comm connection here,' you know what I mean?'[3]

Despite the group's aggressive sound and competitive attitude, in the early months of '67, the MC5 had yet to embrace the confrontational politics that would later define the band's image. For the most part, they were musicians first and hippies second. If anything, the group's objections to the prevailing status quo were more instinctual than ideological. "We knew the world generally sucked and we didn't want to be a part of it," remembered Wayne Kramer. "We wanted to do something else, which amounts to not wanting to get up in the morning and have a real job."[4] However, several key events were about to unfold that would unwittingly thrust the group into the unfamiliar realm of protest politics.

Although few knew it at the time, relations between Michigan law enforcement and the region's counterculture were becoming increasingly strained – an unwelcome development that would soon have grave repercussions. Indeed, as police attitudes towards various suspect groups from hippies to African-Americans began to harden, the City of Detroit was akin to a ticking time bomb ready to explode at the smallest provocation.

The first major skirmish occurred on April 30, 1967 at a Trans-Love sponsored "Love-In," held at Belle Isle, a scenic outdoor recreation area. Hoping to facilitate a greater understanding between Detroit's growing freak population and the general public, the open-air festival was attended by some 6,000 revelers, several members of the press, and a small contingent of mounted police. According to the *Detroit News*, "Sinclair had promised this would be a peaceful gathering. Trans-Love Rangers would patrol the crowds," and only a few mounted police officers were posted to enforce only major infractions of the law.[5] Throughout the day, the crowd was primarily law abiding and peaceful. However,

by nightfall booze began to flow freely and the large audience began to grow restless. When a faction of the Outlaws, a notorious local motorcycle gang, arrived on the scene, the surreal psychedelic gathering began to spin out of control. As the drunken bikers began assaulting hippie bystanders over various perceived sleights, the Trans-Love Rangers started to lose control.

At the suggestion of police, festival organizers attempted to quell the growing unrest by urging the Seventh Seal, a local group, to cease playing. Unfortunately, the tactic was met with stiff resistance by both the crowd and the band. By nightfall, the blaring rock music inspired many to light bonfires and the idyllic park setting became permeated with noxious smoke. As the "Love-In," teetered on the brink of chaos, a motorcyclist began swerving erratically through the crowd. Sensing an opportunity for a show of force, Detroit Police leaped into action and took the biker into custody. Unfortunately, the ill-timed arrest only served to further inflame the angry mass of drunken hippies who began throwing firecrackers at the mounted police. Bottles soon followed. As baton-wielding cops moved in to violently restore order, the once peaceful event devolved into a full-scale riot with police and bystanders sustaining injuries. By 9:30pm, 150 additional officers were called to the scene to restore order and additional arrests were made.

Sinclair would later assert that the violence was largely instigated by "weekend hippies," and "straights." Nevertheless, the writing was on the wall: relations between Michigan's long-haired counterculture and the established order would remain one of mutual mistrust. However, the Belle Isle debacle was but a prelude to a historic event that would shake the city of Detroit to its very roots.

In the pre-dawn hours of July 23, 1967, Detroit police launched a raid on an unlicensed drinking establishment ("blind pig") that specialized in selling booze after hours. As the proprietors were taken into custody, a highly-vocal crowd began to gather and protest the senseless arrests. Despite the seemingly innocuous nature of the raid, the incident would provide the spark that would light the city on fire. Rioting erupted and quickly spread throughout Detroit's African-American communities. Snipers blasted rounds from rooftops while arsonists began torching local businesses and government buildings. As the streets filled with black smoke, scores of violent incidents occurred during the ensuing conflagration. Michigan Governor George Romney would later call in some 17,000 Military personnel, Police, and National Guard Troops to put down the widespread rioting and looting. After two days, order was finally restored

after some 43 had perished, 1700 stores were ransacked, and over seven thousand suspected rioters were taken into custody.

It was the bloodiest and most destructive riot in the nation's history: a singular event that further emboldened Detroit Police in their frequent attacks on both hippies and Blacks. Longhairs were singled out for persecution and African-American youth were routinely beaten by vengeance-minded members of law enforcement. Wayne Kramer quickly found the situation unbearable. "Shit started getting real tense after that [the riots]," he later recalled. Not only were police a dire threat, crime was yet another difficulty the group faced. "Some of our girlfriends got raped and out gear got ripped off a few times. I mean, we'd get to the place where we practiced and the door would be busted open and three more guitars would be gone. So we moved to Ann Arbor."[6]

By the fall of '67, TLE had begun working on a full-time basis with the MC5, and another local band called The Up. Thus, when the 5 relocated to Ann Arbor (also home to The Stooges) in the Spring of 1968, TLE made a similar move and installed its 28-member commune 45 miles west of Detroit in the suburban college town. TLE's new headquarters were two rented houses at 1510 and 1520 Hill Street near the University of Michigan (UM) campus. By this point, the 5 was reaching its full creative potential.

Along with the group's maturing sound, the MC5 began to develop a flashy on-stage presence. To accompany their energetic dance moves on stage (a fitting tribute to James Brown), the group adopted a more hippie appearance with spangled costumes and outrageous long hair. Trans-Love also provided a visually assaulting psychedelic light show to accompany the group. Obviously few bands could match the 5 for personality, power, and dedication. Thus, by the Spring of 1968, Sinclair encountered few difficulties getting the 5 booked to play live gigs. However, the group's newfound identity was quickly drawing the attention of local authorities.

For instance, a May 31st gig at the Grosse Point Hideout almost didn't happen when Harper Woods Police attempted to take Sinclair and Dennis Thompson into custody for puffing ón marijuana outside the club. However, the group's equipment manager, Ron Levine, went back into the club, grabbed the P.A., and informed the crowd that the MC5 wouldn't be playing unless the crowd demanded the immediate release of the band's drummer and manager. Fearing a riot, the club's promoter eagerly persuaded police to unhand Sinclair and

Thompson. As the 5 took the stage, the crowd exploded. Launching their raucous set with "Kick Out The Jams Motherfuckers," the group deployed their infectious "Total Energy" approach to great effect. After a blistering set, the club's promoter attempted to shut them down during "Black To Comm," the group's momentous closing tune. However, Fred Smith urged the crowd to begin chanting "Power! Power! Power!" and electricity was restored allowing the 5 to jam to a dramatic climax of wall-rattling sound.

One week later, the group returned to the Grande for yet another memorable show. With 2000 MC5 freaks packed into the scorching hot auditorium, the group was set to open for Cream, one of England's hottest acts. Yet this wouldn't be any ordinary set. Pumped up by the previous week's victory against the police, the 5 was prepared to further confront and inflame local authorities. According to Sinclair, writing in the *Fifth Estate*, "The band planned to burn an American flag on stage during 'Comm' to make their feelings about this shit clear once and for all."[7] It was well worth noting that at this particular time in history, torching Old Glory wasn't the constitutionally protected act is today. Indeed, to the conservative-minded it was a civic transgression akin to high treason. Thus, when Grande promoter Russ Gibb got wind of the proposed demonstration, he threatened to call in the police. Undeterred, the 5 took the stage to play the group's second set of the evening.

As the temperature rose above 100 degrees inside the packed hall, the MC5 plugged in and launched into its second set of the evening. The group's trademark cacophony of feedback and heavy guitars brought the enthusiastic rock fans to the brink of frenzy. After unleashing a solid set that last nearly an hour and a half, the opening riffs of "Black to Comm" began to reverberate throughout the Grande. As if in a trance, Kramer and Sonic jammed for what seemed like hours before equipment manager Steve "the Hawk" Harnadek brought a tattered flag on stage which he and Tyner defiantly ripped apart. As the audience leaped and cheered, the MC5 raised the group's trademark "Freak Flag"; a large banner with a prominent weed leaf with the word "FREEK" inscribed across it. Shortly after, the 5 reemerged onstage with a completely naked Jerry Younkins of the Magic Veil Light Company who stood before the crowd chanting in harmony with the band's slowly fading amplifiers.

The outlandish show was not without repercussions. Gabe Glantz, who owned the Grande, accused the group of "committing crimes" and "obscenity" and threatened to permanently bar the group from ever playing the popular Detroit

rock venue. However, in light of the fact that Cream had failed to match the 5's energy and collapsed from heat exhaustion after a brief one hour set, to do so would deal himself a severe financial blow as the MC5 were the Grande's leading act.

On June 12th, the group was scheduled to play at the Lansing, Michigan Hullabaloo. However, unlike their traditional stomping ground at the Grande, the 5 played before a markedly different demographic. "Our audience seemed at first to be 90% grease and maybe 10% freeks, and there was a lot of hostility generated throughout the three sets by young short-haired anti-freek forces in front of the stage," Sinclair later wrote in the *Fifth Estate*.[8] Sensing the bad vibes radiating from the front row, the group backed away from the flag-burning antics of the previous week and concentrated on delivering the group's infectious brand of rock and roll. Hoping to "cool the greasers down a little bit," Kramer held his axe like a submachine gun and repeatedly swept the front row with ear-splitting riffs. With each song the tense crowd began to loosen up and by the time Kramer and Sonic started playing the opening licks to "Black To Comm," half the audience were cheering on the Ann Arbor rock quintet. As the group furiously jammed, hippies began flashing the peace sign and were soon emulated by many greasers in the crowd. Although there were threats of physical violence by the more reactionary members of the crowd (at one point someone rushed the stage and shook his fist in Kramer and Sinclair's face), the group finished the show without incident.

For the rest of June, the MC5 jammed at the Sarnia (Ontario) Arena, the Birmingham-Bloomfield Teen Center, Michigan State Fairgrounds, Benton Harbor Scene, and several other shows. On the 23rd, the MC5 returned to the Grande for a memorable show with Blue Cheer, one of the 5's favorite new groups. Slated to open the show were the [Psychedelic] Stooges, headed by the charismatic Iggy Pop; a group the 5 would later call its "Little Brother Band" when they too became managed by Sinclair and a regular opening act. However, before the 5 even reached the stage, Grande manager Glantz warned the group that any foul-language, nudity, and other bizarre displays would be strictly forbidden. Sinclair's response to these various stipulations was decidedly non-committal: "We told him that we just wanted to do our show and make the people happy, but he didn't seem to be too convinced and ended up threatening to turn off the power onstage."[9]

As Russ Gibb attempted to mollify Glantz and allow the MC5 to play, the Grande's

THE STOOGES

THE STOOGES

cantankerous manager remained intractable. Alleging that three detectives were in the crowd preparing to snatch the Ballroom's license should any "un-American" activities occur, Glantz refused to broach any kind of compromise. By this time the crowd began to scream for the MC5. The issue was quickly settled when one of Blue Cheer's managers interrupted the meeting and declared that his clients wouldn't play unless the 5 were allowed to perform. This settled the issue. Sometime after 9:30, Detroit's most electrifying act strolled onstage. Within seconds, Wayne Kramer began blasting the opening riffs for Ted Taylor's "Ramblin' Rose," and madness quickly ensued. Sensing a particularly live crowd, Tyner grabbed the PA and shrieked "KICK OUT THE JAMS, MOTHERFUCKERS!"

Unfortunately, after only four songs, Gibb decided that the 5 could only play one more song. When Sinclair informed Rob Tyner of Gibb's capricious directive, the charismatic vocalist wasted little time relaying Gibb's treachery to the crowd. "The freeks in the audience started hollering for Gibb's ass," Sinclair later recalled.[10] As Tyner directed his fury at the local rock promoter, one of Gibb's employees killed the power to the dismay of the large crowd. Despite the fact that they weren't allowed to play a full set, the MC5 had again challenged the iron rule of the local rock establishment; an act that only added to the group's growing outlaw status.

On the Fourth of July, the MC5 played at the Saugatuck Pop Festival on the West Coast of Michigan in what was destined be yet another adrenalin-filled performance. Fortunately, an easy-going promoter had organized the event in a good-faith attempt to capture the energy of California's Monterey Pop Festival. Thus, there was minimal police presence and the 5 were allowed to cut loose in a totally supportive environment – few would be disappointed.

As the day-long festival raged on, hundreds of MC5 "freaks" thronged the crowd and the group's name was repeatedly invoked by the pent-up audience. As Sinclair later recalled, "They called for the MC5 all through the afternoon, and their chant spread through the whole crowd – over 3000 people, a mixture of stoned-out freeks and drunken frats – until the 5 took the stage from the mighty up around 9 o'clock."[11] In honor of Independence Day, Kramer's Stratocaster was adorned with the stars and stripes and when Tyner screamed "Kick Out the Jams, Motherfucker!" over the P.A., thousands of hands shot in the air in solidarity with the Motor City Five. As their set surged into "Starship," "Ramblin' Rose," and a final, show-stopping "Black To Comm," the audience jumped to its collective feet. As the crowd surged and shrieked, Kramer began smashing his guitar in

emulation and his fellow band mates soon followed suit. Like an American version of the Who, Sonic started demolishing his speakers while Machine Gun kicked over his drum kit.

Unfortunately, others shows didn't go off as well. For example, a 5 gig at The Loft in Leonard, Michigan resulted in the arrest of both Sinclair and Fred Smith. The group had played two gigs there the previous month but was stiffed by the owner on both occasions when the checks he wrote the band subsequently bounced. However, the Loft's owner, Harold Boumer, contacted the 5's booking agent and offered to settle his debts and give the group 40% of the gate if the MC5 played a show on the 23rd. However, as Sinclair later related, "Before we could even get out of the van, we were confronted by this rent-a-pig named Capt. Kenneth Osborne," who forbid the group to perform "that song with motherfucker in it."[12] Although Boumer later apologized for Osborne's attempt to censor the band, Sinclair was on the verge of leaving. However, he was persuaded to stay and the MC5 played the first three songs in their set only to be ordered off the stage by Osborne "because of obscenity".

Although the MC5 freaks in the audience urged the group to keep playing, sensing trouble, Sinclair advised them to play one more song before launching into "Comm." His fears were not unjustified. Apparently Osborne had contacted the Oakland Police Department alleging a "riot" was taking place. Sensing some type of police action, Sinclair had the 5's crew load up all the equipment into the van and hustled the five band members out of the club. Within minutes, in-house security had blockaded all the exits. However, Sinclair was implored by an apologetic Boumer who requested that the MC5 play a second set so he wouldn't have to refund the audience's money. When Sinclair refused, and demanded the group's money, Osborne emerged with several security guards in tow and a brief scuffle ensued. As several security flacks attempted to restrain the towering hippie, Oakland County Sheriff's arrived on the scene, sprayed Sinclair with MACE, and handcuffed him.

As hippies watched in abject horror, screams filled the club as female concert-goers watched the brutal beating. When Fred Smith arrived to inspect what was going on, he was also pounced upon, beaten, and taken into custody. According to Sinclair, "One sister had a camera and I told her to get pictures of the shit, but the pigs spotted her and grabbed her camera and broke it before they pushed her down the stairs too."[13]. As carloads of supporters followed the two hippies to jail, Sinclair and Smith were booked on charges of Assault and Battery on a Police

Officer and had to post an exorbitantly high bond of $2500.

Although the charges against Smith were later dropped, Sinclair was forced to serve a short stretch in the Oakland County Jail where he was forcibly given a haircut by Sheriff's Deputies. These experiences with double-crossing club owners, hippie-hating cops, and repressive local politicians only served to further influence the 5's drift into the realm of radical politics. As Kramer later explained to Fred Goodman, "There was starting to be a clearer division between the straight world and the hip world."[14] "Friends from high school were going to Vietnam and coming back in body bags. And then there was the drug thing. We're all smoking reefer – and we can see this thing is not addictive, we're not knocking off Seven-Elevens in order to keep smoking joints. So they lied to us about that. They lied to us about the war. They're lying to us about everything else." To paraphrase the group's own words, the MC5 were "finally getting hip to the 'American Ruse.'"

Perhaps this seemingly endless series of busts, riots, and hassles prepared the 5 for what would be the group's finest hour: The Yippie-Organized Festival of Life held in August 1968 at the Chicago Democratic Convention. Despite repeated attempts to obtain protest permits from Chicago's Mayor Daly, none were granted setting the stage for one of the most high-profile insurrections in our nation's history. As hippies milled about chanting, holding placards, and engaging in non-violent protest, the Windy City's iron-fisted leader had marshaled some 20,000 Law Enforcement and Military personnel to shut down any incidents of unlawful behavior. The trap was set: by refusing to grant any protest permits, the crafty mayor had transformed the thousands of hippies who arrived at the Conventions into de facto criminals capable of being arrested at a moment's notice. Needless to say, it wouldn't be long before the sparks began to fly.

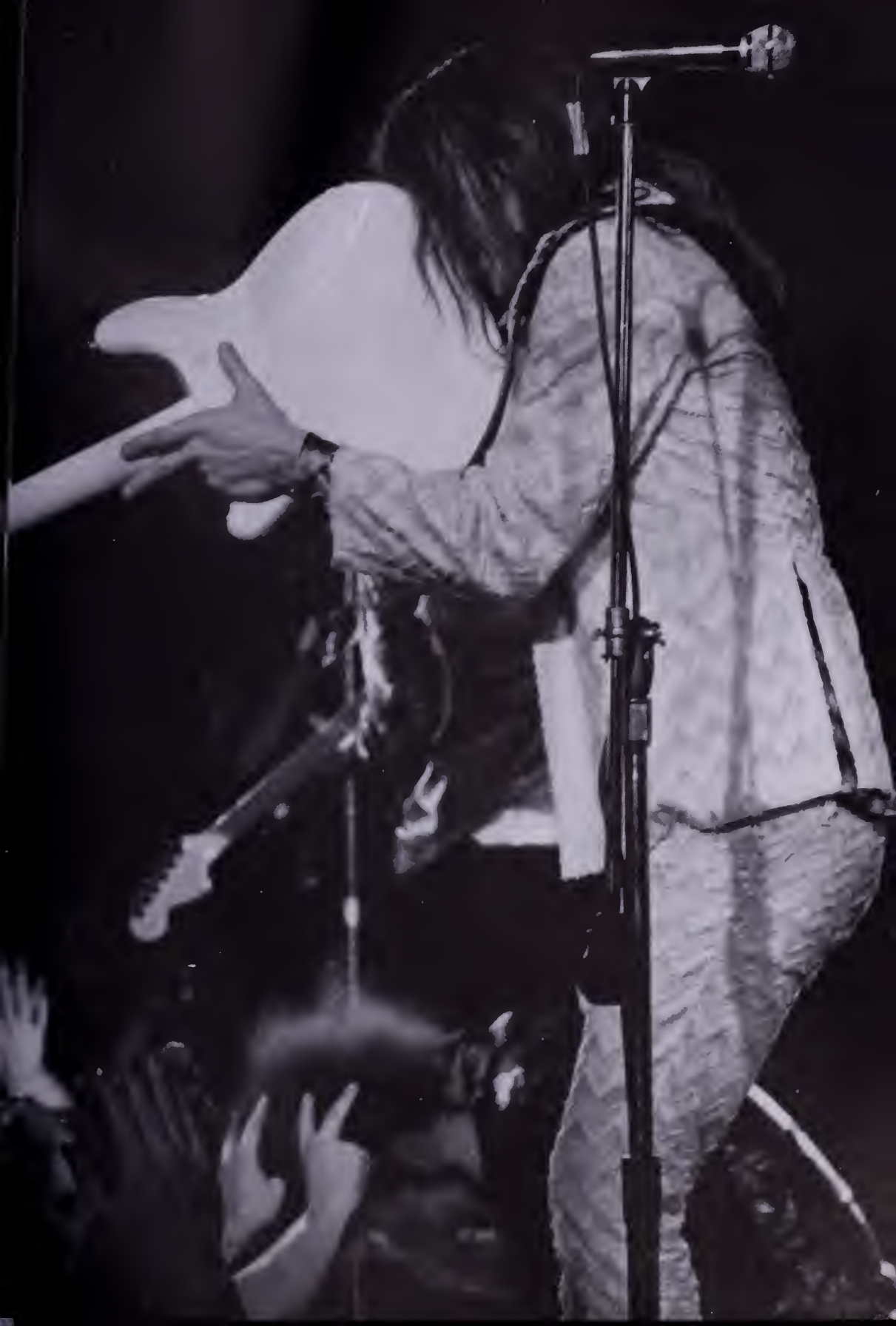
Several renowned rock acts had promised to play at the Festival but the MC5 would be the only group to show up in a historic moment of sheer rock and roll bravado. Their first difficulty was obtaining a power outlet in order to plug in. Fortunately, a nearby hot dog vendor allowed the group to use his and the group unleashed their scorching Detroit sound to thousands of hippies milling about in Chicago's Lincoln Park. Within minutes all hell broke loose. "We played about five or six songs, and then the police troopers started marching into the park with their three-foot batons," remembered Dennis Thompson[15]. By this time, helicopters buzzed the skies and the entire park was surrounded by paramilitary riot police. "Abbie Hoffman came up onstage, grabbed the microphone, and

started rapping about 'the pigs' and the 'siege of Chicago'," Sinclair recalled.[16] However, by this point the MC5 was packing up its gear and taking off.

Norman Mailer would later write glowingly of these long-haired barbarians who braved the jackbooted Chicago cops to defiantly blast away and inadvertently provide the sound track to an urban riot. It would seem that nothing could stop the MC5 juggernaut. Indeed, they had played a blistering set amidst a literal war and had survived. In their brief existence, they had braved everything from dishonest club owners to bloodthirsty police. However, the group's next challenge would require dealing with yet another type of predatory specimen: The Record Company executive.

Notes

1. Fred Goodman, The Mansion On The Hill, (NY: Random House, 1997) page 161.
2. Gary Graf, "Wayne Kramer and the MC5 Still Kickin'," Guitar.com.
3. Ken Shimamoto, "Dennis Thompson: Phantom Patriot," *i-94 bar*.
4. Legs McNeil, Gillian McCain, Please Kill Me: *An Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, (NY: Penguin Books Ltd., 1996) page 46.
5. Julie Morris and Jenny Nolan, "Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll, and Plum Street," *Detroit News*.
6. McNeil, McCain, Op. Cit. page 45.
7. John Sinclair, Guitar Army, (NY: Douglas Book Corporation, 1972), page 77.
8. Sinclair, Op. Cit. page 78.
9. Sinclair, Op. Cit. page 79.
10. Sinclair, Op. Cit. page 82.
11. Sinclair, Op. Cit. page 83.
12. Sinclair, Op. Cit. pp. 88-89.
13. Sinclair, Op. Cit. page 93.
14. Goodman, Op. Cit. page 161.
15. McNeil, McCain, Op. Cit. pp. 44.
16. Sinclair, Op. Cit. page 93.



CHAPTER FOUR
KICK OUT THE JAMS, MOTHERFUCKERS!

"When we started playing in groups, we were 12 and 13 years old and at that age I think what we were interested in was screwing girls...and let's see....we wanted to be rich," mused Fred "Sonic" Smith in a 1972 interview with *Rolling Stone*[1]. While this statement would seem to belie the band's allegedly revolutionary ideals, one must also keep in mind that the 5 would pay an exceedingly heavy price if they failed in their musical endeavors. With the looming threat of the soul-destroying assembly line forever lurking in their mind's eye, the largely working class ensemble were determined to succeed at any cost.

Unfortunately, after spending four years criss-crossing Michigan in search of a larger audience, the MC5 remained a largely Midwestern phenomenon. Yet this lack of recognition would provide an important catalyst to their unconventional sound. Freed from the often debilitating scrutiny of hyper-critical rock journalists and image-conscious industry execs, their experimental fusion of free jazz, blues, and proto-Metal was allowed to gestate and mature without interference. Live shows provided yet another outlet for the band's professional frustrations and, with their amps cranked to eleven, they rarely failed to deliver. Indeed, as many of their peers would ruefully learn, few groups could match the MC5's high-intensity brand of acid rock.

Although the 5 was often booked at the Grande and other locales to open for more seasoned (and well-known) acts, Wayne Kramer and Fred Smith's wall-ratting power chords, Rob Tyner's guttural vocal style, and Thompson and Davis's solid rhythms often proved a tough act to follow. "They blew other bands away completely!" recalled Sinclair in 1977. "The biggest boost to the 5 and their fans was when the legendary Big Brother & the Holding Company came into town on the biggest myth in the business, and got wiped out by the 5 on the first night"[2].

In essence, any band that played Detroit faced an imminent showdown with the 5. Needless to say, the guitar-toting revolutionaries showed little respect for acts unwilling to embrace their fast-paced brand of atonal rock. Ever the propagandist, Sinclair chronicled the band's many exploits in a series of dispatches which appeared in the *Fifth Estate*. As his colorful tales of baton-wielding police and double-crossing club owners were circulated in the underground press, Sinclair further established his unruly clients as a force to be reckoned with.

By the Fall of '68, their collective efforts paid off when Danny Fields, a flamboyant, acid-gobbling A & R Representative with Elektra records, appeared in Motor City to get a firsthand look at the MC5 experience. Fields, whom Sinclair had previously met on a promotional trip to New York, was a gregarious pot-smoking sometime journalist valued for both his acumen at spotting new talent (he would also sign The Stooges as part of his foray into Detroit Rock City) and ability to relate with the nation's rapidly growing counter-culture.

"Bob Rudnick and Dennis Frawley had a column in the *East Village Other* called 'Kocaine Karma,' and the two of them were relentless in loading me down with propaganda about this band from Detroit, the MC5 which stood for the 'Motor City 5'," he later recalled[3]. At their prompting, Fields flew to Motor City and witnessed a predictably cacophonous show at the Grande Ballroom. Elektra's notorious "company freak," who later met with Sinclair and the band back at their Ann Arbor headquarters was instantly hooked on both the 5's feedback-laden sonic assault and gun-toting revolutionary swagger

"I just thought they were the sexiest thing I'd ever seen," Fields would later say. "I mean, there was a Minister of Defense carrying a rifle! Wearing one of those bullet things – a cartridge belt! With real bullets in it! I never saw a man wearing a cartridge belt. Even the girls were wearing these things. And they were serious!"[4]

The potential presented by the new alliance with Elektra wasn't lost on Sinclair who spoke approvingly of "breaking through to a national audience" and hoped that the "whole total assault program" would extend the band's influence beyond the confines of the Midwest through "national tours, radio and television exposure, write-ups in all the pop magazines" and other "incredible opportunities for reaching more and more people with our Motor City Madness"[5]. In essence, the revolution was about to go multimedia.

The band was signed on September 26, 1968 for $20,000 and in a stroke of genius, Sinclair and Elektra company execs decided the best method to showcase the MC5's "Total Energy" concept was to make their first album – to be titled *Kick Out The Jams* – a live recording. Over a period of two nights, free concerts were held on October 30 and 31st at the Grande Ballroom. Rock journalist Ian Fines captures the palpable intensity of these legendary shows:

"It is Halloween Night, 1968...The thunder of primal rage bursts from the guitars of Wayne Kramer and Fred 'Sonic' Smith, while vocalist Rob Tyner squirms and leaps like a dispossessed demon, and the rhythm of a million discontented youths is kept constant by drummer Dennis Thompson and bassist Michael Davis. This is the night the MC5 are recording their first ever album live in front of a jam-packed audience. As a result of this night, the nation and the rest of the world would be exposed to the force of the MC5 , along with their revolutionary aims...At this point in time...it seems almost possible that the MC5 and the Revolution could take over the nation".[6]

As the "solution" rocked the sold out Ballroom, the two gigs were recorded and distilled into a scorching 8-song LP. While producers Jac Holzman and Bruce Botnick put the finishing touches on what would become a seminal album in the pantheon of modern rock, many in the band were convinced they had finally arrived. "It all peaked then and there," remembered Wayne Kramer, "I knew finally, it was really gonna happen. We were on the cusp of the success smiling at us just around the corner".[7]

The album cover, which featured cropped photos of the band set amidst a surrealistic backdrop of American flags and protest gatherings included liner notes penned by Sinclair. The polemical document inveighed in a shrill tone against those who would separate rock and roll music from its political subtext. Indeed, he urged that a unifying "force" be unleashed to seize the moment and capture the revolutionary potential of America's youth:

"...The MC5 **is** that force. The MC5 **is** the revolution, in all its applications. There is no separation. Everything is Everything. There is no [sic] thing to fear. The music will make you strong, as it is strong, and there is no way it can be stopped now. All Power to the People! The MC5 is here now for you to hear and see and feel now!...Go wild! The world is yours!...Kick out the **jams**, motherfucker!..." [emphasis in the original].[8]

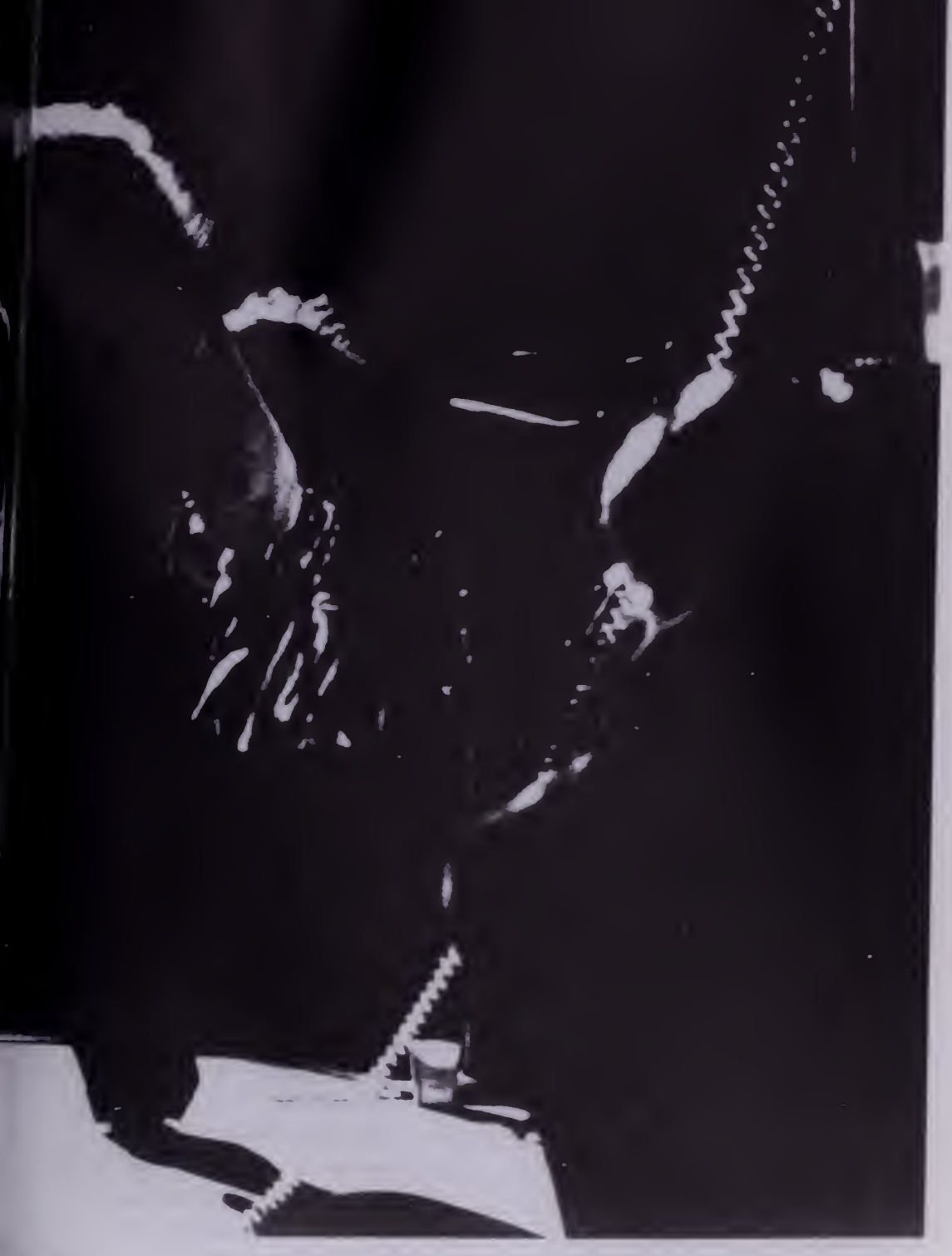
TRANS LOVE

PURITY

ACCURACY

M

Guidance: John Sinclair/Trans



5

Energies

elektra

Beginning with one of JC Crawford's high-octane introductions, *Kick Out The Jams* leads off with a hard-hitting cover of Ted Taylor's "Ramblin' Rose" which effectively combines Kramer's falsetto vocals and full-tilt guitar attack. The full-force opening track is followed by their signature tune, "Kick Out The Jams, Motherfuckers," which was truncated on the album to merely "Kick Out The Jams," in an ill-fated effort to avoid controversy. The song, which remains the 5's most notorious song, still sounds unruly even by today's standards. The discordant guitar leads, crunching rhythms, and rapid-fire vocals would later resurface in latter-day outfits from the Ramones to the Misfits to Metallica. The LP then segues into "Come Together," Tyner's erotically-charged tribute to unbridled sexuality followed by Kramer's explosive, riff-laden "Rocket Reducer No. 62 (Rama Lama Fa Fa Fa)." The latter track opens up the throttle for "Borderline," a high-decibel opus to Free Love.

"Motor City Burning," is by far the most restrained track on the album. However, the traditional blues-based melody lends the song a darkly subversive character with its references to rooftop snipers, arson, and social unrest. "I'd just like to strike a match for freedom myself/I may be a white boy, but I can be bad, too. Yes, it's true now, yes, it's true now. Let it all burn! Let it all burn!" The dirge-like power-chords of "I Want You Right Now," evokes latter-day Heavy Metal acts ranging from Black Sabbath to Motorhead. The highly-innovative recording climaxes with "Starship," a psychedelic journey into outer space that reverberates with feedback, distortion, and experimental free jazz riffs.

Before the album was even released Fields began laying the groundwork for a full-scale media blitz. Calling the 5, "the best goddamn band in the world," he lobbied staff members from both *Rolling Stone* and the *Village Voice* on behalf of his new discovery[9]. Jon Landau of *Rolling Stone*, whose relationship with the band remains mired in controversy, would attend an MC5 show in Detroit and urge the magazine to run a front page cover story. Meanwhile other articles appeared heralding the MC5's furious Motor City Sound. As part of the promotional campaign, Elektra financed a brief East Coast tour in December of 1968.

For their first date, the 5 headlined at the Boston Tea Party, a popular Massachusetts rock venue. The December 15 show appeared to go smoothly until Sinclair agreed to allow spokesmen for an East Coast Anarchist cell known as The Motherfuckers to address the crowd. Although the violence at Altamont was still a year away, a creeping nihilism and embrace of violent tactics had begun to

infect the once peaceful hippie milieu. The New York-based Motherfucker faction exemplified this growing disillusionment. Mainly comprised of junkies, ex-cons, and other lumpen elements, the hard-edged activists ridiculed all manifestations of aesthetic pretension in favor of a revolutionary praxis that glorified destruction and disdained the student protest movement.

Predictably, the Motherfucker spokesman assailed the club's owners and warned the assembled hippies that they were being shafted by ruthless rock promoters. Tea Party owner Don Law was furious and permanently banned the 5 from playing his club. While his prohibition of the band might seem inconsequential, Law was part of a small, but powerful cartel of club owners – and his sinister influence would plague Sinclair and the band for the rest of the brief tour.

Undeterred, they decamped to New York's East Village where Elektra had arranged for the up-and-coming act to play two free concerts at the renowned Filmore East. The ubiquitous Motherfuckers, who considered themselves proprietary spokesmen for the Village "community," attended the raucous first show which occurred with little or no incident. However, when the anarchists demanded tickets for a second show slated for December 26, Filmore promoter Bill Graham registered his displeasure at the Motherfuckers' pot-smoking antics at the previous show by refusing to let the long-haired radicals into the concert. Soon Graham was surrounded by an angry mob and, in a brief scuffle at the door, was assaulted by a chain-wielding hippie whom he would later claim was none other than Rob Tyner (although Tyner was backstage when the clash occurred).

As Graham fumed, Sinclair further alienated the vindictive rock guru when he sided with the East Village anarchists. "We heard about the fight as we were waiting to go on. I told them we weren't gonna go on unless they let them in," Sinclair recalled[10]. Despite this expression of revolutionary solidarity, the 5 were attacked after the show when they were spotted leaving the Filmore in a limousine. "A Motherfucker at the mike made a public announcement about what the group was doing, a crowd swarmed outside, pulled them out of their car, messed them up a bit, threw their records at them, came back in, and announced to the crowd that they had been betrayed by 'phonies,'" Ben Morea stormed in a Motherfucker publication.[11]

As Graham and others plotted their vengeance against the 5, *Kick Out The Jams* was released in January, 1969. Needless to say, few knew what to make of the revolutionary rock band. Indeed, even those on the cutting edge of the music

scene were unsure what to make of the psychedelic Detroit upstarts. Long before he had turned the scathing review into a veritable art form, Lester Bangs (who would later come to regret these words), assailed the 5's angry, "primitive" sound in *Rolling Stone* and dismissed their ideological beliefs as mere revolutionary hype:

"...About a month ago the MC5 received a cover article in *Rolling Stone* proclaiming them the New Sensation, a group to break all barriers, kick out all jams, 'total energy thing,' etc. etc. etc. Never mind that they came on like a bunch of 16 years [sic] old punks on a meth power trip-these boys, so the line ran, could play their guitars like John Coltrane and Pharaoh Sanders played sax! Well the album is out now and we can all judge for ourselves. For my money they come on like more like Blue Cheer than Trane and Sanders, but my money has already gone for a copy of this ridiculous, overbearing, pretentious album; and maybe that's the idea, isn't it?..."[12]

Despite uneven (or muted) critical reviews, by February, the album was resonating among music fans. Unfortunately the album began encountering opposition from distributors. In particular, the Hudson's Department Store chain refused to sell the album due to the gratuitous use of the term "Motherfucker" on the album's title track and in the liner notes. In response, the MC5 took out a full-page advertisement in the February 13-27 issue of the *Ann Arbor Argus*, (a local hippie publication) which urged fans to "Kick out the jams, Motherfuckers! and kick in the door if the store won't sell you the album on Elektra." The ad included the Elektra logo with the exhortation "Fuck Hudson's!" The band charged the advertisement to Elektra – a decision that would quickly and fatally sour their relationship with the label.

Despite a widespread ban on the album by Hudson's and other distributors, the album continued to inch up by the Billboard charts. Meanwhile Sinclair organized a self-financed West Coast tour from March 7-21. Although Graham's malign influence ensured the 5 would never play before a large audience on either coast, shows were booked at the Straight Theater from July 14-16. Situated in the heart of Berkley at the crossroads of Haight and Cole streets, the concert space was a renovated vaudeville theater transformed into a psychedelic concert venue that had hosted the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, Country Joe, and a multitude of renowned acts. Nevertheless, it appears many weren't prepared for the 5's "paleocybernetic" experience.

"We had never heard of the MC5 before the Straight Theater gig. After that one night we never forgot them" recalled Mike Walter, a roadie for Clover, the opening band.[13] As Clover, a country act finished up their set, they stayed behind to watch the headline act:

"The MC5...took the stage with a roar from the mighty Marshalls. Loud, no way, beyond loud, almost to pain loud. So loud, you could not even think!...For a finale the lead singer calls a girl to come up on the stage. She does not want to, but is reluctantly led up to the stage where the singer starts to sing to her, and she responds lovingly. They both slowly get more frantic and she starts ripping his clothes off. He rips at her clothes and they both go down on stage, in each other's arms, screwing like mad till the song ended. We all figured that some poor girl was just raped on stage... The show was over and I went backstage to load up the equipment and saw the girl that had just been raped sitting at a sewing machine, repairing the ripped costumes for the next show!...Wow!."[14]

It would seem that the 5 had found a decidedly receptive audience in the highly radicalized Bay Area. An article by Art Johnson which appeared in the March 21-27 issue of the *Berkley Barb* also speaks glowingly of the MC5 (as well as the White Panther Party). "The Five, who have a total of one and a half of higher education between them , are raw alienation. When I heard them at the Straight last week, half the audience was paralyzed and the other half were groping themselves," Johnson observed approvingly.[15]

However, a later trip to San Francisco would reveal that Elektra officials were planning on re-releasing a sanitized version of "Kick Out The Jams, Motherfuckers!" re-titled "Kick Out The Jams, Brothers and Sisters." Sinclair was further enraged when he learned that the new LP included a sanitized version of his incendiary liner notes. Although *Kick Out The Jams* would become one of the better selling albums of year, Elektra were incapable of weathering the political firestorm surrounding their newly-signed artists. In March of 1969, the MC5's contract with the label was broken by mutual agreement.

Unfazed by this sudden turn of events, Fields hit the ground running and enticed Jerry Wexler of Atlantic records to re-sign the 5 as part of $50,000 deal. However, within months, the band would become estranged from Sinclair who had bigger troubles ahead. The long-haired avatar of total revolution would be in prison by July and the band would decamp to a farm in Hamburg, MI after a complete break with the White Panther Party. Time was quickly running out for both the MC5 and their charismatic spokesman.

Notes

1. Ben Fong Torres, "Shattered Dreams In Motor City," *Rolling Stone*, (June 8, 1972).
2. John Sinclair, "How the Jams Were Kicked Out," *Zigzag*, (July-August, 1977).
3. Legs McNeil, Gillian McCan, Please Kill Me: *The Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, (New York, NY: Penguin Books Ltd.) p. 42.
4. Ibid.
5. John Sinclair, Guitar Army, (New York, NY: Douglas Book Corporation) pp. 46-47.
6. Ian Fines, "The Rise and Fall of the MC5," *Perfect Sound Forever*, (November 1998). (www.perfectsoundforever.com)
7. Ken Kelley, "Wayne Kramer – An interview with the MC 5's Other guitarist," *Addicted To Noise* (ATN), (January, 2002).
8. Sinclair, Op. Cit. pp. 110-111.
9. Sinclair, *Zigzag*, Op Cit.
10. Ibid. pp. 171.
11. Black Mask & Up Against the Wall Motherfucker: *The Incomplete Works of Ron Hahen, Ben Morea, and the Black Mask Group*, (London, UK: Unpopular Books, 1993) pp. 136-140.
12. Lester Bangs, "Kick Out The Jams," *Rolling Stone*, April 5, 1969.
13. Mike Walter, "MC5 At the Straight Theater".
14. Ibid.
15. Art Johnson, "Motor City Madness," *Berkley Barb*, (March 21-27, 1969).

CHAPTER FIVE

CULTURE JAMMERS

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE WHITE PANTHER PARTY

White Panther Party 10-Point Program:

1. Full endorsement and support of Black Panther Party's 10-Point Program.
2. Total assault on the culture by any means necessary, including rock n' roll, dope and fucking in the streets.
3. Free exchange of energy and materials – we demand the end of money!
4. Free food, clothes, housing, dope, music, bodies, medical care – everything free for everybody!
5. Free access to information media – free the technology from the greed creeps!
6. Free time and space for all humans – dissolve all unnatural boundaries.
7. Free all schools and all structures from corporate rule – turn the buildings over to the people at once!
8. Free all prisoners everywhere – they are our brothers.
9. Free all soldiers at once – no more conscripted armies.
10. Free the people from their "leaders" – leaders suck – all power to all the people – freedom means free everyone!

–John Sinclair, Minister of Information White Panther Party
November 1st, 1968

As the MC5 stood on the threshold of International fame, back in Ann Arbor, the band's political counterparts grimly plotted revolution. The riot-torn Chicago Democratic Convention had sounded the keynote for what was to be one of the

worst periods of social and political unrest since the labor battles of the Great Depression. Along with mounting opposition to the Vietnam War, the simmering conflict between the liberated hippie counterculture and the established order was reaching critical mass. Longhairs clashed with law enforcement on a daily basis and operatives affiliated with the FBI's notorious Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) were deployed as *agents provocateur* in order to sow dissent and finger student activists and radicals. As 1968 drew to a close, the once hopeful idealism that dominated Sinclair's Trans-Love Energies (TLE) gave way to a more militant political stance. This drastic shift in tactics crystallized in November with the formation of the Michigan White Panther Party (WPP). The Party's brief emergence (and subsequent dissolution) can be considered one of the strangest chapters in the history of American political dissent.

As the birthplace for Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the state of Michigan had already established itself as a stronghold for the student protest movement. Originally the youth branch of the socialist-minded League for Industrial Democracy (LID), in 1960 SDS struck out on its own and began a decade-long campaign of activism on behalf of civil rights, social justice, and an end to war. Confirmed pacifists, members of the student-based movement advocated social change through consciousness raising and non-violent protest. The organization's 1962 Port Huron Statement, which railed against economic injustice, racism, and other social ills, remains one of the key political manifestos of the 60's New Left.

However, despite an obvious regional affiliation and a shared consensus on many political issues, in many respects the two organizations were worlds apart. As a political faction mainly comprised of well-heeled college students, SDS could afford the luxury of idealizing the noble "working classes" in high-blown Marxist phraseology. By contrast, the hard-edged Panthers (and the MC5 for that matter) were the children of welders, machinists, and assembly line workers and held no such illusions about the true realities of the grinding Blue Collar experience. Indeed, they would rebel at the very thought of toiling away at some Neo-Soviet factory collective. Moreover, while many SDS members adopted a respectable public image in order to promote the group's agenda, the WPP refused to mollify the gatekeepers of the status quo with well-mannered appeals or calmly-worded position papers. One might argue that the WPP eagerly sought to validate the worst fears of the ruling order. This excerpt from the *White Panther Manifesto*, exemplifies the Party's notoriously confrontational tone:

"...Our program of rock and roll, dope and fucking in the streets is a program of total freedom for everyone. We are totally committed to carrying out our program. We breathe revolution. We are LSD driven total maniacs of the universe. We will do anything we can to drive people crazy out of their heads and into their bodies.

ROCK AND ROLL music is the spearhead of our attack because it is so effective and so much fun. We have developed organic high-energy guerrilla bands who are infiltrating the popular culture and destroying millions of minds in the process. With our music and our economic genius we plunder the unsuspecting straight world for money and the means to carry out our program, and revolutionize its children at the same time..."[1]

The watchword underlying what Panther historian Jeff A. Hale calls the "White Panther myth," was freedom; a foul-mouthed anti-authoritarianism engendered by far too many brushes with truncheon-wielding cops. In contrast to violent revolutionary cells like the Weather Underground which broke away from the SDS in 1969 due to frustration with the ongoing Vietnam War, the WPP was an organic phenomenon. Indeed, the militancy of the WPP had more to do with unsavory police practices in the state of Michigan and the City of Detroit than the unfolding events in Indochina. As Hale relates, "The Vietnam war was inconsequential to the evolution of the White Panthers; the forces and motives underlying the group's 'radicalization' are to be found elsewhere."[2]

One such "force" was the new addition to Detroit's underground economy: LSD 25. By 1967, downtown Detroit and Ann Arbor were awash in LSD and the infectious "revolution trip" began to take hold. Years later, John Sinclair would reflect on the transformative powers of the powerful acid which he described as "The irreplaceable catalyst in the post-Western experiment...the spiritual equivalent of the atomic bomb," a life changing event which "blasted a hole in industrial consciousness big enough for young mutants to run through to the future."[3]

Leading the aforementioned mutants from the wreckage of the past would be the MC5; a volatile transmission belt capable of disseminating the Party's message to a worldwide audience. At this juncture, the 5 was becoming an intensely political band and the group's songs began to reflect the Panther influence. For example, "The Human Being Lawnmower," a brilliant, through-composed, seven-part rock opus, articulated the fears of an entire generation raised under the frightening specter of both nuclear annihilation and the military draft. The heavy,

guitar-driven track likened the military-industrial-complex to a harvester of human souls that leaves corpses in its wake ("Chop Chop Chop"). "American Ruse," a Chuck-Berry inspired protest against state oppression assailed the hypocrisy of living in a "free" society controlled by authoritarian politicians and baton-wielding police.

Needless to say, in the 60's protest milieu, the notion of a nationally known rock band promoting the ideas of an armed political sect was an unprecedented occurrence. This is not to say that many popular artists didn't align themselves with overtly political causes and organizations. Nevertheless, few mass movements had an electrifying "House Band" like the MC5 directly promulgating its agenda. When the MC5 was signed to Elektra, Sinclair's strategy of harnessing the energy emanating from the psychedelic community seemed on the verge of becoming a reality. Indeed, as the 5 gained influence, the Panther leader envisioned his "total assault on the culture" occurring nationwide; a political stratagem he hoped would mobilize the country's disaffected youth.

Thus, while the WPP's more politically-focused peers lived like Trappist monks and spent every waking hour discussing central economic planning, participatory democracy, and other aspects of revolutionary theory, the Michigan revolutionaries blasted loud, angry rock and roll, smoked dope, dropped acid, and preached a reductivist version of German psychologist Wilhelm Reich's doctrine of salvation through sexual liberation.

A propaganda leaflet issued in 1969 shows the prominent role the 5 played in the Panther's initial organizing efforts:

"Brothers and Sisters:

Since the release of the MC5 album and because of the nation [sic] wide coverage in the Underground papers and because the people are ready, we have been getting letters and questions from people all over the country responding to the WHITE PANTHERS CALL TO ACTION!

YOU ARE WHAT YOU DO. We'll send you the White Panther buttons, literature, and give you information about REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLES, going on here and around the world. The rest is up to you, you can receive this information and act on it, and be a WHITE PANTHER, or you can receive the information and not act on it, and be a paper tiger with a paper ass [sic] hole..."
[Capitals in original][4]

Despite the heavy emphasis on culture, John Sinclair's pyrotechnic literary style did little to undermine the belief that the organization was made up of well-trained urban guerrillas. The White Panther name was derived from the Black Panther Party (BPP); an organization supported by many within the TLE community. One of the leading BP advocates was Lawrence Robert "Pun" Plamondon: the individual who perhaps came closest to realizing the Panther revolutionary ideal. Born in Traverse City MI to a telephone company employee and a half-breed Native American, the rebellious youth was adopted during his infancy by a well-to-do-family. Possessing a keen intellect and an excellent academic record, the young Plamondon seemed destined for future success. However, he also displayed a flair for adventure and a boundless energy for new experiences. Thus, at the tender age of 16, he discarded his privileged upbringing and hit the road on a cross-country hitchhiking tour. Plamondon would resurface in California toiling alongside impoverished farm workers. After relocating to Detroit in 1967, he made fast friends with Sinclair and began urged him to start up a Black Panther support group – an idea that would form the basis for the White Panther Party (WPP).

Throughout the Party's brief existence, the self-professed hippie guerrillas would retain many characteristics of the Black Panther Party and would often interact with Ann Arbor's BPP chapter. The rampant sexism and paramilitary posturing which defined the early Panther program were emulated by the WPP. Sinclair would also issue a BPP-influenced "10 Point Program" that demanded "The power for people to control their own destinies"; "An end to all cultural and political repression; "free access to all information media and to all technology"; an end to corporate ownership of property; a free educational system; the liberation of all prisoners; the elimination of all borders; and a number of other revolutionary dictates.[5]

Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman's Youth International Party (YIPPIE) provided further inspiration. The YIPPIE influence can be evidenced by the Party's outrageous press statements, exaggerated prose style, and the tendency to grant one another absurd quasi-governmental titles such as Minister of Information (Sinclair), Minister of Culture (Gary Grimshaw), and Minister of Defense (Pun Plamondon). Despite the underlying humor to these antics, many took them for the real thing. Elektra producer Bruce Botnick would vividly recall his visit to the Panther's Hill Street headquarters in Ann Arbor:

"...I'm this twenty-three-year-old kid, married only two weeks before, wearing a

blue Sixties long sued jacket, black leather pants – I was a very mod dresser in those days. And, I mean, these guys are very funky. They're looking at us suspiciously, they've got guns and a printing press down in the basement printing revolutionary literature, and here's this kid looking very rich. I was scared shitless. I remember calling my wife and I was so nervous I started to cry over the phone."[6]

If Botnick was disturbed by the Panther's revolutionary posturing, Michigan police were foaming at the mouth. Since 1952, the State Legislature had passed a measure known as the Communist Control Act which allowed the State Police Commissioner to form a clandestine "Red Squad" to ferret out and compile dossiers on politically suspect individuals and organizations. Shortly thereafter, a similar branch was formed within the Detroit Police Department (DPD). Both units were subsequently deployed to monitor the activities of beatniks, peace activists, and student radicals.[7] A 1970 internal memorandum prepared by the DPD Intelligence Division reveals that some half dozen locations in three different precincts were under surveillance as possible "Trouble Areas."[8] One such residence listed as the "Boone's Farm Commune" at 4531 Avery is described as a "Meeting Place of the White Panthers; Guns observed on premises; possibility of explosives." Thus, as we shall soon see, the sheer scope of covert police actions directed at the Panthers would far exceed the group's revolutionary potential.

Having worked assiduously to gain access to government documents pertaining to both the MC5 and the WPP, Jeff A. Hale's research indicates that as early as 1968, FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover himself was personally obsessed with both the acid rock group and their political confederates. Outraged by the band's "filthy" and "obscene" lyrics, the mob-connected G-Man's initial dislike of both the WPP and the 5 was validated by the fact that several Panthers were seen amidst the tumult of the Ann Arbor riots, a three-day hippie revolt that occurred in June 1969[9]. With his worst fears confirmed, the staunch anti-Communist ordered his agents to "monitor, disrupt, and damage" the fledgling political faction.[10] Thus, while the organization was dismissed by many 60's-era revolutionary cells for its overblown rhetoric and political adventurism, local police and officials working on behalf of the National Security State would spare no expense seeking to bring down the small Panther collective.

Oblivious to these sinister machinations, at their Ann Arbor headquarters on Hill Street where the group lived in an unconventional communal setting, the

Panthers remained committed to building a viable organization. Press releases and pamphlets were churned out; the *Sundance*, a Party publication, was instituted; and alliances were forged with fellow radicals across the country. Party members were urged to read the works of Mao, Eldridge Cleaver, Burroughs, Lenin, Che Guevara, and other radical texts. Unfortunately, the WPP had raised its "freak flag" at an inopportune time. The election of Richard M. Nixon to the Presidency had included a promise to crack down on hippie dissidents and the Panthers would become a major focus for the Administration. By 1969, Party members were repeatedly harassed and arrested on a variety of charges, and they sensed that some type of showdown with law enforcement was imminent.

As Hale asserts, "The image of peace loving hippies who were forced to fight back" was a central component of the "White Panther Myth."[11]. Nevertheless, as a result of intense surveillance, frequent arrests, and other encounters with the law, "the militant, offensive side of the White Panther myth acquired a more potent basis in reality."[12]. Less than a year after the Party declared its existence, unseen forces began to strike out at the fledgling radicals. The first major blow would be directed at John Sinclair, the Party's leading voice. On July 28, 1969, Judge Robert J. Colombo sentenced the bearded revolutionary to a 9-10 year prison sentence for a minor marijuana offense (possessing two marijuana joints) which dated back to the winter of 1967.

Although draconian sentences for minor drug offenses had become a routine method of detaining politically suspect individuals, the lengthy prison term exceeded even the most pessimistic expectations. The FBI's interest in both Sinclair and the Panthers make it easy to speculate that the unseen hand of the Bureau may have been working behind the scenes to influence Colombo's decision. Regardless, the worst was yet to come. On October 7, 1969, Sinclair, Plamondon, and fellow Panther Jack Forrest were indicted by a federal grand jury as co-conspirators in a plot to bomb a CIA Recruiting office in Ann Arbor.

The September 29 attack caused an estimated $6,000 in damage and was part of a string of bombing attacks on federal installations throughout the Detroit area. Ann Arbor Police Chief Walter Krasny would tell reporters from the *Michigan Daily* that "all seven bombings have the same mode of operation."[13] According to the paper, Forrest and David Valler met with Plamondon at the Detroit headquarters of the *Fifth Estate*, a radical publication, to discuss the plot and on the September 24, the Panther Defense Minister was given a "quantity of dynamite" to carry out

the operation which was then detonated at the CIA office on the 29th.[14]

These allegations were based on the testimony of Valler, considered the man responsible for the Detroit-area bombings. The shadowy ex-hippie remains one of the more mysterious figures in the White Panther saga. Although responsible for a sustained campaign of terror, he would reappear as a reformed hippie who had rejected the allegedly nihilistic psychedelic lifestyle. "Since being sent to prison," the *Daily* reported, "he has written several 'anti-hippie' articles for Detroit newspapers, included a story headlined 'Drugs Ruined My Life' which appeared on the front page of the *Detroit News*."[15]

A Panther press release issued in the wake of the indictments with the banner headline "Planet Hit Hard By Wierd [sic] Shit – People Rising Up Angry" openly assailed Valler as a snitch. Reiterating Valler's involvement in the Detroit area attacks, the Panther release alleged that "the conspiracy ruse was used by the pigs to intimidate the suspected bombers and their friends into finking on one another. The pig plan worked: David Valler has become a fanatic lunatic and has turned State's witness while in jail...and is testifying to all kinds of lies to save his own skin in some kind of weird deal with the pigs."[16]

While both Forrest and Sinclair were charged, Plamondon would further actualize his revolutionary yearnings by going underground. According to Hale, "Plamondon moved with ease in the underground, hiding out on the West Coast for a few months, then moving on to Canada, northern and central Europe, and finally to Algeria, where he met with Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panther leader in exile, whose philosophy of black-white cooperation in the Movement had been instrumental in the creation of the White Panthers."[17] He would later return to the States and hide out in the woods of Michigan penning occasional articles for movement publications. When he was finally captured by Michigan State Police in July 1970, political materials found in his Volkswagen would set off a string of events that would reverberate to the highest levels of government.

Alarmed by the incendiary materials, Detroit Special-Agent-in-Charge Neil J. Welch penned a teeth-chattering report for his FBI superiors that compelled Hoover to declare the Panthers one of the most dangerous revolutionary organizations in the US. This would compel Nixon Attorney General John Mitchell to order an unprecedented "National Security" wiretap on Panther headquarters on September 9, 1970. This unconstitutional legal move would be followed by high level government hearings into Panther activities. By the end of the summer,

the CIA, National Security Agency (NSA), Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and other elements of the Intelligence Community were actively observing Panther activities.

In yet another bizarre twist, in late 1970, the Panthers were at the center of yet another case when the Nixon Administration sought court approval to allow any sitting President the right to order a wiretap providing the Chief Executive believed the group constituted a threat to National Security. In a unanimous 8-0 decision, the High Court refused to approve the patently unconstitutional "Mitchell Doctrine." One cannot understate the implications of this momentous decision. Had the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Executive Branch, the Watergate break-in would have been considered a legal act because the wiretapping of the DNC office was committed at the behest of the Nixon Administration.

Thus, in yet another cruel irony, the WPP inadvertently played a role in the downfall of the Nixon White House that had declared war on the Midwestern radicals. Shortly thereafter, the CIA conspiracy case against the beleaguered Panthers would join a number of other alleged "conspiracy" cases that never materialized due to the federal government's egregious use of illegal wiretaps and other unconstitutional surveillance methods.

During this seemingly endless ordeal, the WPP continued to advocate on behalf of John Sinclair's release, and even attempted to forge a link with Abbie Hoffman's YIPPIE movement. However, much had changed since the party's hopeful inception. The MC5 had broken away from the Panthers, heroin use was proliferating throughout the Michigan hippie community, and Sinclair was preparing for a historic court battle that would forever change the nation's marijuana statutes.

After signing with Atlantic Records, the MC5 hired future Springsteen mentor Jon Landau as their producer. The resulting album, *Back In The USA*, was pure, stripped-down, three-minute rock and roll as much pop as protest. The songs and playing were superlative, but the mix was thin and the album failed to garner much sales.

A huge FREE JOHN SINCLAIR cause celebre gained steam. John Lennon wrote and recorded a song simply called "John Sinclair" and super-rad Abbie Hoffman was booted off the stage at Woodstock by Pete Townshend while trying to draw

attention to Sinclair's plight. Sinclair and his lawyers took to the courts and fought the Michigan pot laws as ridiculously punitive. In 1972, John and Yoko, Stevie Wonder, Allen Ginsberg and others performed a huge concert in Ann Arbor to free him. It was a wonderful gesture, but it was the legal strategy that actually did the trick. Within days, his conviction was overturned and the Michigan marijuana penalties were drastically reduced. After two-and-a-half years, John Sinclair was free.

In 1971, the MC5 recorded one more album for Atlantic, *High Time*, their finest studio effort – and their last. Within a year, the band broke up – poverty-stricken, dope-addicted, a dream derailed. Sinclair transformed the White Panther Party into the Rainbow People's Party and became active in electoral politics as well as managing other bands and producing the legendary Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals. He also continued pursuing his first love: poetry.

Notes

1. John Sinclair, "White Panther Manifesto," (November, 1968).
2. Peter Braunstein, Michael William Doyle (editors), Imagine Nation*: The American Counterculture of the 1960's and 70's* (UK: Routledge, 2002). Specifically cited: Chapter 5: Jeffrey A. Hale, "The White Panthers 'Total Assault on the Culture'," p. 126.
3. Black, Op. Cit. pp. 114.
4. White Panther leaflet, undated, 1969
5. John Sinclair, White Panther 10-Point program.
6. Jac Holzman and Gavan Daws, Follow The Music: *The Life And High Times Of Elektra Records In The Great Years Of American Pop Culture*, (CA: First Media, 1998) pp. 261.
7. "The 50's At Home," Michigan Historical Center, 2000.
8. Detroit Police Memorandum, Detective Inspector Dennis J. Mullahy, Detective Lieutenant William R. McCoy, December 21, 1970.
9. Hale, Op. Cit. pp. 146-147.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. David Spurr and Bill Dinner, "White Panther Leaders Indicted For CIA Bombing," *Michigan Daily*, (October 9, 1969).
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.

16. "Planet Hit by Wierd Shit – People Rising Up Angry," Panther News Service, (October 9, 1969).
17. Hale, Op. Cit. pp. 147

KICK OUT THE JAMS (1969)

(Elektra Records; produced by Bruce Botnick and Jac Holzman)

1. Ramblin' Rose
2. Kick Out The Jams
3. Come Together
4. Rocket Reducer No. 62 (Rama Lama Fa Fa Fa)
5. Borderline
6. Motor City Is Burning
7. I Want You Right Now
8. Starship

BACK IN THE USA (1970)

(Atlantic Records; produced by Jon Landau)

1. Tutti Frutti
2. Tonight
3. Teenage Lust
4. Let Me Try
5. Looking At You
6. High School
7. Call Me Animal
8. American Ruse
9. Shakin' Street
10. Human Being Lawnmower
11. Back In The USA

HIGH TIME (1971)

(Atlantic Records; produced by Geoffrey Haslam)

1. Sister Anne
2. Baby Won't Ya
3. Miss X
4. Gotta Keep Movin'
5. Future/Now
6. Poison
7. Over And Over
8. Skunk (Sonicly Speaking)

"American Ruse" 44, 76
Back In The USA (LP) 82, 90
Bacilla, Emil 27
Bangs, Lester 60
Berry, Chuck 15, 16, 21, 76
Black Panther Party (BPP) 11, 77, 81
"Black To Comm" 19, 33-34, 37, 38, 42, 43
"Borderline" 58
Botnick, Bruce 55, 77-78
Burrows, Pat 17, 18
Cleaver, Eldridge 81
"Come Together" 58
Davis, Michael 17, 18, 24, 27, 53, 55
Detroit Artists Workshop 22, 23, 24, 25
Detroit riots, 1967 35-36
Elektra Records 54, 55, 58, 59, 60, 61, 76, 78
Festival of Life, 1968 44-45
Fields, Danny 54, 58, 61
Gaspar, Bob 17
Gibb, Russ 27, 28, 33, 37, 41
Grande Ballroom 18, 27, 33, 34, 37, 38, 42, 53, 54, 55
Grimshaw, Gary 15, 26, 28, 77
High Time (LP) 82, 90
Hoffman, Abbie 45, 78, 82
Holzman, Jac 55
"Human Being Lawnmower" 75
"I Want You Right Now" 58
Kick Out The Jams (LP) 11, 55, 58, 59-61, 90

"Kick Out The Jams, Motherfuckers!" 28, 33, 37, 58, 61
Kramer, Wayne 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 24, 25, 27, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 42, 53, 55, 58
Landau, Jon 58, 82
Leary, Timothy 26
Lennon, John 82
"Looking At You" 19
LSD 25, 26, 75-76
Mailer, Norman 11, 23, 45
Motherfuckers, the 58-59
"Motor City's Burning" 58
"One Of The Guys" 19, 28
Plamondon, Pun 9, 77, 78, 80, 81
"Ramblin' Rose" 42, 58
"Rocket Reducer No. 62" 58
Rolling Stones, The 11, 16, 17, 18, 19
Sinclair, John 9, 19, 21-28, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 43, 44, 45, 53, 54, 55, 58, 59, 60, 61, 74, 75, 77, 78, 79, 80, 82
Sinclair, Leni 22, 24, 25
Smith, Fred "Sonic" 16, 17, 18, 24, 27, 37, 38, 43, 53, 55
"Starship" 22, 24, 58
Stooges, the 28, 36, 38, 54
Sun Ra 21, 25
Thompson, Dennis "Machine Gun" 17, 18, 24, 26, 34, 36, 37, 43, 44, 53, 55
Trans-Love Energies (TLE) 25, 26, 28, 33, 34, 35, 36, 74, 77
Tyner, Rob 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 24, 27, 33, 37, 42, 53, 55, 58, 59
Velvet Underground 11
White Panther Party (WPP) 9, 11, 22, 24, 61, 73-82

The MC5 remain one of the most explosive and legendary rock bands of the '60s. Formed in Detroit and managed by John Sinclair, leader of the revolutionary White Panther Party, the MC5 soon became a potent musical and political force in their own right, and with their rally cry of "Kick Out The Jams, Motherfuckers!" they pioneered a devastating fusion of freeform rock and incendiary protest. Storming live performances – often supported by fellow Detroit rock legends Iggy And The Stooges – cemented the band's iconic status.

THE FUTURE IS NOW! is an illustrated account of the origins of the MC5, their relationship with Sinclair and the White Panthers, the creation of their seminal LP *Kick Out The Jams*, and the political mayhem of 1969 which led to the group being dropped by their record label Elektra and the Panthers being indicted and broken by the US government.

Rock Music

$15.95 • £9.95

ISBN 1-84068-109-8

9 781840 681093

www.creationbooks.com